

A life of Jesus



The purpose of this document is to construct, for my own study, a pseudo-life of Jesus with a single narrative thread, comprised mainly of a backbone of text from contemporary sources such as the gospels, Josephus, and Tacitus [286](#).

I've added my own notes on points that I was originally unable to understand by reading the gospels, including some information about the political, social, and historical context. I've attempted to omit all material that, in my amateur opinion, seems to be a later overlay that would not have been recognizable to Jesus or his contemporaries.

Despite my title, it is not possible to reconstruct the teachings or life of Jesus at any significant level of detail. At best we can

tease out certain more or less reliable fragments. Neither will any fragments that anyone can extract be likely to improve, reform, or enrich the religion of Christianity. That religion revolves around a highly fictionalized character who is in many ways completely unlike the historical person. Its doctrines are frequently incompatible with Jesus's teachings, to the extent that we can know them.

B. Crowell, 2021

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1 Timeline

Political timeline:

ca. 72-4 BCE — Herod the Great is king of Judea, with Rome as his patron. He renovates the Temple.

ca. 4 BCE-39 CE — The region is ruled by tetrarchs and an ethnarch, including Herod Antipater (“Antipas”) over Galilee and Perea. In 34-36 CE, Antipas loses a war with Aretas IV of Nabatea, an Arab trading empire centered on modern Jordan.

41-44 CE — Herod Agrippa reigns over a reunified Judea. He engages in Roman power politics and sticks up for the Jews.

54-68 CE - Reign of Nero. Persecution of Christians.

66-73 CE — First Jewish-Roman War. The Temple in Jerusalem is destroyed.

Religious timeline (all dates approximate):

4 BCE - Jesus born.

30 CE - Jesus crucified.

36 CE - John the Baptist executed (uncertain date)

50 CE - Pauline epistles begin?

65 CE - James, brother of Jesus, martyred.

90 CE - Josephus writes Antiquities of the Jews.

80-120 CE? - The label “Christian” becomes widely understood.

70-110 CE? - Gospel of Mark written?

160 CE - First Apology of Justin Martyr. The earliest reliably

dated record of a fully formed ancestor of modern orthodox Christianity, with such features as the eucharist.



2 John the Baptist

The Gospel of Mark is likely the first written biographical material about Jesus,¹ and it begins not with a description of Jesus but of John the Baptist. We know nothing reliable about John's birthplace or date of birth. Luke, in the course of a miraculous birth story, claims that John came from a priestly family:

Luke 1:5 There was in the days of Herod [the Great], the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias [John's father], of the priestly division of Abijah.

John was a great celebrity of his time and place. He merits a long passage in Josephus – much longer than the brief mention of Jesus². A pagan writer like Epictetus, writing as late as ca. 130 CE, demonstrates a clear consciousness of a baptism-based

¹The Pauline epistles were probably 10-20 years earlier, but assume their audience (mostly gentile and illiterate) is already familiar with basic facts about the life of Jesus.

²Antiquities of the Jews 20-9; excluding the likely forgery in 18-3

sect such as John's, but no consciousness of Jesus or his sub-sect. During the first century CE, it is probably most accurate to talk about something like a John-Jesus sect of Jews rather than any exclusivist or distinctly recognized religion based on Jesus.

Josephus, writing around 90 CE, says:³

Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod [Antipater]'s army [ca. 36 CE, by the Nabateans] came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the forgiveness of sin,⁴ but for the purification of the body; supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness.

Josephus had himself in fact been a follower of a similar ascetic:

And when I was about sixteen years old, I had a mind to [try on for size] the several sects that were among us. These sects are three:- The first is that of the Pharisees, the second that Sadducees, and the third that of the Essens, as we have frequently told you; for I thought that by this means I might choose the best, if I were once acquainted with them all; so I contented myself with hard fare, and underwent great difficulties, and went through them all. Nor did I content myself with these trials only; but when I was informed that one, whose name was Banus, lived in the desert, and used no other clothing than grew upon trees, and had no other food than what grew of its own accord, and bathed himself in cold water frequently, both by night and by day, in order to preserve his chastity, I imitated him in those things, and

³Antiquities 18-5-2

⁴Josephus contradicts Mark 1:4. The contradictions show that authority to forgive sin was a cultural sore point.

continued with him three years. So when I had accomplished my desires, I returned back to the city, being now nineteen years old, and began to conduct myself according to the rules of the sect of the Pharisees, which is of kin to the sect of the Stoics, as the Greeks call them.

Josephus was a Jerusalemite of priestly ancestry, who fought against the Romans, was enslaved by them and then freed, worked for them as a translator, and finally became a Roman citizen. We can see that he is a knowledgeable informant about this type of dissident movement, and also that it was not unusual to find men of John and Jesus's types in their time and place. As seen by their contemporaries, they were unexceptional characters straight from central casting: a wilderness baptizer and a false messiah. Josephus's description of the significance of the baptism ritual may also be sanitized in order to comport with Josephus's sympathies with the Roman-Jewish regime. Matthew, Mark, and Luke give descriptions that include symbolic details omitted by Josephus, and possibly also social teachings that go beyond the kind of personal spiritual seeking described by Josephus.

Epictetus, a stoic philosopher, writes ca. 110 CE:

So why do you call yourself a stoic, why do you deceive the people, or play the part of a Jew or a Greek? Don't you see, how each person is called a Jew, a Syrian, or an Egyptian? And, should we see someone vacillate, we habitually say that he's not a Jew, but he's playing a part. But when he adopts the experience of baptism and having chosen, then is he both is Jew and is recognized as one.⁵

And, in a separate passage on fear:

What makes the tyrant an object of fear? – His guards [...] and their swords [...] Why, then, is it that, if you bring a child into the

⁵translation by B. Crowell

presence of the tyrant while he is with his guards, the child is not afraid? [...] [Or] If, then, a man [...] be in such a frame of mind, due to some madness or despair, that he cares not one whit about having, or not having [his family, property, or bodily integrity, then he won't be afraid of tyrants]. Therefore, if madness can produce this attitude of mind toward the things which have just been mentioned, and also habit, as with the Galileans, cannot reason and demonstration teach a man that God has made all things in the universe, and the whole universe itself, to be free from hindrance, and to contain its end in itself, and the parts of it to serve the needs of the whole?⁶

From these passages, it sounds as though well-informed people in the Roman empire, four generations after the crucifixion, conceptualize the landscape of Jewish psychology as one in which there are various tendencies, sometimes corresponding to local cults. Neither John the Baptist nor Jesus of Nazareth is named be Epictetus. But John has impinged on his consciousness, since baptism was a minor sectional custom that was only brought to the fore by John. Epictetus is probably not conscious of Jesus, and would have seen him as a character from central casting, a fearless Galilean bandit or zealot. In this picture, although religion is not distinguished from politics or ethnicity, the religious scene seems to be one in which a vaguely defined and nonexclusive John-Jesus Jewish movement is recognizable. If John is Captain Kirk in the popular consciousness, then Jesus is little more than an Ensign Sulu.

Mark 1:4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching the baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins. All the country of Judea and all those of Jerusalem went out to him. They were baptized by him in the Jordan river, confessing their sins.

John's actions and the symbolism of the Jordan were extremely politically provocative both to Rome and to the Judean

⁶translation by W.A. Oldfather, 1925

client regime and its centralized theocracy at the Temple in Jerusalem.²⁸⁸ Unlike Jesus, who operated only in Galilee except at the very end of his life, John is described as preaching to the Judeans. His preaching was probably in Perea, in the southern trans-Jordan.⁷

Mark describes John as an ascetic:²⁸⁹

Mark 1:6 John was clothed with camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey.

The costume is designed to evoke the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), and many people express confusion about whether John literally is a reincarnation of Elijah. Matthew, unlike Mark, has John prefiguring Jesus's mission by saying in addition,

Matthew 3:2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

and hurling abuse directly in the face of the priestly class as a "brood of vipers" (3:7). We don't know whether John's message was actually so explicitly antiestablishment, but the apocalypticism would make sense in terms of the prophetic significance of the Elijah costume:

Malachi 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes.

Luke recounts further social teachings of John (likely inauthentic ²⁸⁹):

Luke 3:10 The multitudes asked him, "What then must we do?" He answered them, "He who has two coats, let him give to him who has none. He who has food, let him do likewise." Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher,

⁷His execution by Herod Antipas means that he was within his jurisdiction, which covered Galilee and Perea. To attract large numbers of people from Jerusalem to the eastern side of the Jordan, he would have had to be in Perea rather than Galilee. John 3:23 identifies one location as "Aenon near Salim," for which several locations have been proposed.

what must we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than that which is appointed to you." Soldiers also asked him, saying, "What about us? What must we do?" He said to them, "Extort from no one by violence, neither accuse anyone wrongfully. Be content with your wages."

Josephus continues with the story of John's doom:⁸

Now when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, [for they seemed ready to do any thing he should advise,] thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death [around 30 CE]. Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure to him.

John was believed by some to have been the messiah, and he retained a body of followers for generations after his death.

3 Jesus's origins and early life

Mark, John, and Paul ignore the question of Jesus's birth.⁹ Embedded in the miraculous birth stories of Matthew and Luke is

⁸Mark's account of John's death is fantastical. Incidentally, Mark also refers to Herod as a king, whereas actually he was a tetrach. Matthew corrects this in most places, but misses making the correction in 14:9. Mark Goodacre proposes this type of editorial fatigue as good evidence that Matthew based his gospel on Mark's.

⁹Luke and Matthew provide stories of a miraculous birth, along with a "masacre of the innocents" (Matthew 2:16).

the statement that he is an oldest son,¹⁰ born (ca. 4 BCE) in very humble circumstances.

Luke 2:7 [Mary] gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger...

Matthew 1:18 ...After his mother, Mary, was promised in marriage¹¹ to Joseph, before they came together, she was found pregnant by the holy spirit.

A typical age for a newly married woman was about 13.¹² Working from naturalistic assumptions, Matthew's description means that Jesus was what we used to call in twentieth-century American culture an illegitimate child. In his own culture's conceptual world, he was considered a *mamzer*,¹³ which doesn't have to do with marriage but means someone born from forbidden sex. A *mamzer* was part of a marginalized social class. The skeptical Nazareans later scornfully recount the background of this uppity local boy (290):

Mark 6:2 "What is the wisdom that is given to this man, that such mighty works come about by his hands? Isn't this the manual laborer, the son of Mary¹⁴ and brother of James, Joses, Judah, and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" So they were offended at him.

Regardless of whether Jesus was conceived miraculously, he was perceived within his community as illegitimate. Pharisees debating Jesus say:

John 8:41 "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one

¹⁰But Chilton hypothesizes that his brothers were older.

¹¹μνηστευθείσης

¹²Chilton, "Rabbi Jesus: an intimate biography," p. 6

¹³Chilton

¹⁴They insult Jesus by referring to him as Mary's son. As the eldest brother, he should be referred to as Joseph's son. The implication is that he is illegitimate. Aslan, p. 37; Hill, p. 163.

Father, God.”

Matthew 1:19 Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, intended to divorce her secretly.

Mary’s husband Joseph is mostly absent in the gospels, and entirely so once Jesus is an adult, which suggests that he was mostly absent in Jesus’s life. Descriptions of Jesus’s family relations generally fail to mention Joseph. For example, Joseph is the only member of Jesus’s immediate family who is not present at a mourning gathering in Jerusalem (possibly in the same room where the last supper had occurred):

Acts 1:14 All these [the eleven remaining apostles] with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer and supplication, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Jerome hypothesized that Joseph died when Jesus was young. There is no record that Jesus ever married, which would have been anomalous for a man of his age except that, as a mamzer, he was forbidden from marrying most Jewish women, the exceptions being other marginalized classes such as mamzers, converts to Judaism, and freed slaves. Josephus (Antiquities 20-9-1) confirms that Jesus has a brother James, who was later to become the movement’s main leader in Jerusalem [290](#):

...[the procurator Albinus] assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others ...[and] delivered them to be stoned

Jesus grew up in the tiny village of Nazareth, [291](#) in Galilee, [290](#) speaking Aramaic. [291](#) He probably never learned to read ([292](#)), but he must have had an opportunity at least to hear an oral Aramaic version (targum) of the Jewish bible, hear psalms sung, and to receive instruction from John the Baptist.

At the three yearly great festivals, Jews in the Holy Land were theoretically obligated to travel to Jerusalem, where they gathered in great crowds at the Temple:

Luke 2:41 His parents went every year to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast; and when they had fulfilled the days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. Joseph and his mother didn't know it, but supposing him to be in the company, they went a day's journey; and they looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they didn't find him, they returned to Jerusalem, looking for him. After three days they found him in the Temple, sitting in the middle of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When they saw him, they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I¹⁵ were anxiously looking for you." He said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?"

This miracle story is a Christian fabrication (as shown by the three days, which are Christian symbolism), but it may preserve a factual picture of a precocious child getting an education against all odds, or it may be that Jesus gained his education as a teenager or an adult, like Frederick Douglass.

The gospels leap over Jesus's youth and young adulthood to ca. 28 CE, when Jesus would have been about 31.

Luke 3:1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign [14-37 CE] of Tiberius Caesar...the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. He came into all the region around the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for remission of

¹⁵In some manuscripts, this was altered by scribes who didn't like the implication that Joseph was Jesus's father.

sins.

Among John's followers were a number of people who were later to become the early Christians. One of the few things we can know securely about the historical Jesus is that he was baptized by John:

Mark 1:9 In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

The gospels describe this baptism in ways that seem like attempts to rewrite history and make Jesus rather than John the master, which would be contrary to the historical evidence that John was the much more important and well known figure during the two men's lifetimes. Jesus's baptism is also attended by a supernatural appearance by God, which doesn't meet my criteria for inclusion [294](#).

Others baptized by John include Simon Peter, apostle and founder of the Church (p. 20), and his brother, the apostle Andrew (John 1:40); as well as more who are described in Acts:

Acts 19:1 While Apollos [an Alexandrian Jew who was a follower of John and then converted in Acts 18] was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper country, came to Ephesus and found certain disciples. He said to them, "Did you receive the holy spirit when you believed?" They said to him, "No, we haven't even heard that there is a holy spirit." He said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." Paul said, "John indeed baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe in the one who would come after him, that is, in Christ Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the lord Jesus.

All the gospels agree that Jesus gathered male and female followers and created his own knock-off of John's illicit knock-off of the Temple's rites. There was some kind of competition and splintering. Many of John's followers remained faithful to him

long after his death, and the synoptic gospels only describe Jesus as scavenging John's followers after John's death, although Jesus may have died first. But the gospel of John, which in general disagrees completely with the synoptics on chronology, describes this as beginning even while John was alive, first in John 1:35-45, and later:

John 3:22 ...Jesus came with his disciples into the land of Judea. He stayed there with them and baptized. John also was baptizing in Enon near Salim, because there was much water there. They came and were baptized; for John was not yet thrown into prison. Therefore a dispute arose on the part of John's disciples with some Jews about purification. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, he baptizes, and everyone is coming to him."¹⁶

Jesus goes on a solitary vision quest:

Mark 1:12 Immediately the Spirit drove [Jesus] out into the wilderness. He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals; and the angels were serving him.¹⁷

This mythologized story must be a romanticized account of Jesus's decision to split from John's movement and form his own. John survived his student's execution by about seven years, although the gospels move up the date of John's death so that he can be depicted as a mere forerunner of Jesus.²⁹⁵

¹⁶The evangelist immediately follows this up with John the Baptist papering over the dispute, in a passage that doesn't meet my criteria for inclusion ²⁸⁶.

¹⁷Luke 4 has a lengthier account of the temptation, with the devil offering Jesus worldly power. *Personal opinion: This is unlikely to have any connection to Jesus's actual visions and spiritual experiences. It sounds more like the later sanitizing of the early Christian religion for consumption by Romans, who did not want to be part of a religion that preached the overthrow of the empire.*



4 Early mission and calling of the apostles

Failure at Nazareth

Luke 3:23 Jesus himself, when he began to teach, was about thirty years old...

Mark 1:14 ...Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the good news of God's kingdom, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and God's kingdom is at hand! Repent, and believe in the good news."²¹¹⁶

Luke 4:14 Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and news about him spread through all the surrounding area. ...He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up.¹⁸

Mark 6:1 When the sabbath had come, he began to teach in the synagogue,¹⁹ and many hearing him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things?" and, "What is the wisdom

¹⁸Luke places this near the beginning of Jesus's activities in Galilee, Mark at the end.

¹⁹Both Luke and Mark set the scene at a synagogue, although it's not actually clear how realistic it is to imagine that Nazareth would have had a synagogue. Luke 4:16-21 has Jesus reading from a scroll "as was his custom" and teaching about Elijah and Isaiah, with messianic implications. As a mamzer, Jesus is actually not even supposed to speak in a synagogue.

that is given to this man, that such mighty works come about by his hands? Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James, Joses, Judah, and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" So they were offended at him.²⁰

Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own relatives, and in his own house." He could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. He marveled because of their unbelief.

Luke 4:23 He said to them, "Doubtless you will tell me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself!'²¹ Whatever we have heard done at Capernaum, do also here in your hometown." He said, "Most certainly I tell you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown."²²

Luke, unlike Mark, finishes the scene with an escalation of the conflict and the Nazareans trying to execute Jesus (Luke 4:28), apparently for the crime of false prophecy [295](#), but this has the hallmarks of a garbled elaboration ([2119](#)).

In general, Luke and John paint a lurid picture of Jesus as a fugitive, which is probably an ahistorical exaggeration [296](#). Later in Luke:

Luke 9:7 Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by him; and he was very perplexed, because it was said by some

²⁰Jesus's listeners refer to his questionable paternity (p. 12). Why is this mamzer lecturing us? Jesus reacts angrily and ups the ante by declaring himself a prophet.

²¹I.e., people have challenged Jesus by saying that although he claims to be able to cure crazy people, they think he himself is crazy.

²²Jesus explains his lack of healing power in his hometown to be a punishment for its refusal to accept him as a prophet. Luke 4:25 then has Jesus continue his diatribe with a passage that manipulates scripture (Chilton, p. 99) in order to imply that Jesus is not only a prophet but the messiah, sent by Elijah, and that the messiah's mission is also to the gentiles—all of which is Luke's agenda (Funk, p. 280).

that John had risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again. Herod said, “I beheaded John, but who is this about whom I hear such things?” He sought to see him.

Later, in Jerusalem:

Luke 13:31 ...some Pharisees came, saying to him, “Get out of here and go away, for Herod wants to kill you.”²³



The first apostles

Mark 1:16 Passing along by the sea of Galilee,²⁴ he saw Simon [=Peter [2101](#)] and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you into fishers for men.” Immediately they left their nets, and followed him. Going on a little further from there, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them, and they left their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired servants, and went after him.

The first four apostles are Simon Peter [2101](#), Andrew, John, and James the Greater. Where John baptized people and then sent them home, Jesus carries out an itinerant lifestyle ministry. Mark’s account makes it sound as though Jesus essentially just

²³One of the few positive references to Pharisees in the gospels. Cf. Mark 12:28, p. 67, in which a scribe is praised.

²⁴John 1:44 says Bethsaida.[297](#)

picks up the first four random guys he sees on the street, and later we see that none of them are very bright, and some of them (Judas and Peter) are partially or completely unfaithful. John 1:35-45 describes a completely different recruitment process in which Jesus starts by poaching John the Baptist's followers and then bringing in their close family members. The two accounts are in conflict, since Simon Peter and Andrew are described in John 1:40 as having been followers of John the Baptist, which would not have been the case (on naturalistic assumptions) if they were just the first random people Jesus saw. Discounting the supernatural aspects of both accounts, the poaching story is the plausible one. Mark's agenda is to elevate Jesus over his peers by making them foolish, random, or subservient to Jesus. Jesus departs from John the Baptist's exclusive and proprietary franchise and uses some of John's followers as the cadre of an intended come-as-you-are mass movement open to all male and female Galilean Jews.

Mark 1:21 They went into Capernaum, and immediately on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue and taught. They were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes [298](#).

Summary of time and place in the gospels: [298](#).

Female followers

Luke 8:1 [He] went about through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of God's kingdom. With him were the twelve, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; and Joanna, the wife of Chuzas, Herod's steward; Susanna; and many other females²⁵ who served them from their possessions.²⁶

²⁵ἑταραι πολλαί

²⁶This passage from Luke depicts women as powerful and active supporters, which is remarkable for Jesus's time and place. Strangely, this passage is prefaced in Luke 7:36-50 with a highly sexualized and implausible scene in which Je-



The role of women in the church aroused controversy, as shown in the following quotes from later writers:

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek,²⁷ there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The pagan critic Celsus complains:

What is said by a few who are considered as Christians, concerning the doctrine of Jesus and the precepts of Christianity, is not designed for the wiser, but for the more unlearned and ignorant part of mankind. ...they alone wish and are able to persuade the ignoble, the insensate, slaves, stupid women, and little children and fools.

Although Luke 8:1-3 distinguishes between the all-male twelve apostles and the women, Paul, writing earlier than Luke, addresses a long list of men and women equally as church leaders in Romans 16, including:

Romans 16:7 ...Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fel-

lus is eating at a pharisee's house when a woman "in the city, a sinner," anoints Jesus with oil ("messiah" and "Christ" mean "anointed one"), wipes his feet with her hair, and kisses them. This seems to be Luke's more lurid and dramatized version of Mark 14:3-9, in which the woman, just as implausibly, breaks the jar and pours the oil on his head, maintaining sexual propriety. Luke and Matthew in general tend to add sex and violence to Mark's plainer journalistic account.

²⁷Jesus himself strictly forbid spreading his teachings to the gentiles.

low prisoners, who are notable among the apostles,²⁸ who were also in Christ before me.

Writings such as 1 Timothy 2:8-15 that demand total submission from women are deutero-Pauline reactions to Paul, and therefore far removed in time from Jesus's actual teachings. There are also deutero-Pauline interpolations on this topic in the Pauline epistles, e.g., 1 Corinthians 14.

Capernaum

Mark 1:23 Immediately there was in their synagogue [in Capernaum] a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, saying, "Ha! What do we have to do with you, Jesus, you Nazarene? Have you come to destroy us? I know you who you are: the Holy One of God!"²⁹ Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" The unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching? For with authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him!" The report of him went out immediately everywhere into all the region of Galilee and its surrounding area.

Immediately, when they had come out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's wife's mother³⁰ lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. He came and took her by the hand and raised her up. The fever left her immediately, and she served them.

²⁸The specific word apostle is one that Paul used freely and applied to himself.

²⁹The exorcisms in Mark follow a certain pattern, with an unclean spirit recognizing Jesus, calling him by name, and recognizing him with an unambiguously messianic title: the Holy one of God (1:24), the Son of God (3:11), the Son of God the Most High (5:7). Thus until very late in Mark, demons are the only ones to clearly state that Jesus is the messiah. Jesus himself only uses the term "son of man," which is ambiguous (≥104).

³⁰So Simon Peter is married.

At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to him all who were sick and those who were possessed by demons. All the city was gathered together at the door. He healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons. He didn't allow the demons to speak, because they knew him.



Mark 1:35 Early in the morning, while it was still dark, he rose up and went out, and departed into a deserted place, and prayed there. Simon and those who were with him searched for him. They found him and told him, “Everyone is looking for you.” He said to them, “Let’s go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because I came out for this reason.” He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out demons.

A healer is culturally expected to set up shop in one place, accept money, and pray when he heals. Jesus doesn't do these things. The reason for the secrecy and hiding is clarified in the following incident.

The leper

Egerton 1 recto (35) And behold, a leper came, saying, “Rabbi

Jesus, I traveled with lepers and ate with them at the inn, and then I became a leper myself.”

Mark 1:40 A leper came to him, begging him, kneeling down to him, and saying to him, “If you want to, you can make me clean.” Being moved with anger,³¹ he stretched out his hand, and touched him, and said to him, “I want to. Be made clean.” When he had said this, immediately the leprosy departed from him and he was made clean. He sternly rebuked him and immediately threw him out, and said to him, “See that you say nothing to anybody, but go show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing the things which Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.”

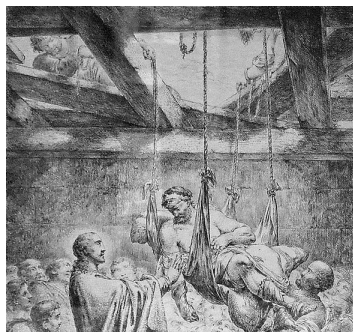
Egerton 1 recto (47) “...and don’t keep messing up.”³²

Mark 1:45 But he went out, and began to proclaim it much, and to spread about the matter, so that Jesus could no more openly enter into a city, but was outside in desert places. People came to him from everywhere.

This scene has a seditious point that would be obvious to first-century Palestinian Jews, and this clarifies the secrecy and hiding, as well as Jesus’s initial anger ([2103](#)).

³¹or gut-wrenched or moved to compassion [2102](#)

³²“Μηκέτι ἀμάρτανε,” usually translated “sin no more,” uses a Greek word whose basic meaning is to make a mistake or miss the target.



The paralytic

Jesus now engages in the kind of rabbinic debate that previously was only indirectly described.

Mark 2:1 When he entered again into Capernaum after some days, it was heard that he was at home. Immediately many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even around the door; and he spoke the word to them. Four people came, carrying a paralytic to him. When they could not come near to him for the crowd, they removed the roof where he was. When they had broken it up, they let down the mat that the paralytic was lying on. Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."³³

But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak blasphemies like that? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you reason these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to tell the paralytic, 'Your sins are

³³In their culture, sin, ritual uncleanness, and illness are all outward marks of a single condition.

forgiven;’ or to say, ‘Arise, and take up your bed, and walk?’ But that you may know that any man ²¹⁰⁴ has authority³⁴ on earth to forgive sins”-he said to the paralytic- “I tell you, arise, take up your mat, and go to your house.”

He arose, and immediately took up the mat and went out in front of them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

In John 2:1-11, Jesus turns water into wine at the wedding at Cana.

Calling Matthew

Mark 2:13 He went out again by the seaside. All the multitude came to him, and he taught them. As he passed by, he saw [Matthew³⁵] sitting at a toll booth.³⁶ He said to him, “Follow me.” And he arose and followed him.

Mark 3:7 Jesus withdrew to the sea with his disciples; and a great multitude followed him from Galilee, from Judea, from Jerusalem, from Idumaea, beyond the Jordan, and those from around Tyre and Sidon. A great multitude, hearing what great

³⁴The issue of authority, implicit in the story of the leper, is here made explicit. The scribes can hear Jesus’s “son of man” in Aramaic in the generic sense as referring to any human – including a mamzer like Jesus. The sensitivity of this idea of forgiving sins is independently attested by the fact that Josephus (p. 7), contradicting Mark 1:4, goes out of his way to say that John the Baptist’s baptism is not for this purpose. (John 5:1 also inserts a dispute in this miracle story, but with different legalistic details.)

³⁵The apostle. Named in Mark as Levi the son of Alphaeus.

³⁶The word τελώνιον can’t be translated as an indoor tax office, since from context, Matthew was outside. Tax collectors were hated both because the taxes were exorbitant and because the taxes were being collected for the Romans. Taxes would flow from merchants to people like Matthew, then to a wealthy person who had bid to get the lucrative contract for a whole district, then through the Herodian client state, and finally to the Romans. Because Matthew was at the bottom of the food chain, we can’t infer that he was wealthy or literate.

things he did, came to him. He said to his disciples that a little boat should stay near him because of the crowd, so that they wouldn't press on him. For he had healed many, so that as many as had diseases pressed on him that they might touch him. The unclean spirits, whenever they saw him, fell down before him and cried, "You are the Son of God!" He sternly warned them that they should not make him known.

The commissioning of the apostles

John the Baptist never deputizes anyone to act on his behalf, but Jesus does:

Mark 3:13 He went up into the mountain and called to himself those whom he wanted, and they went to him. He appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee; and John, the brother of James (whom he called Boanerges, which means, Sons of Thunder); Andrew; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James, the son of Alphaeus; Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

The notion of a specially designated set of 12 apostles is probably not historical ([2108](#)). Among Jesus's followers who held authority, the two who are most securely known to be historical people are Peter and Jesus's brother James (not traditionally considered one of the twelve). There is a plausible record that the core leadership of the Jewish-Christian movement in Jerusalem ended up being these two, along with John the apostle (who cannot have been the same person as the antisemitic evangelist).

Jesus reassures the apostles: [2109](#)

Matthew 10:16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep among wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

Matthew 10:26 “Therefore don’t be afraid of them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.”

Matthew 10:29 “Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore don’t be afraid. You are of more value than many sparrows.”

But:

Matthew 10:34 [2109](#) “Don’t think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn’t come to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man’s foes will be those of his own household.”

All such pithy sayings of Jesus are believed to have come from a document referred to as the Sayings Gospel Q. This is the two-document hypothesis: that Mark and Q were written down first, with Matthew and Luke later using them as sources. Q may be a record of a first-generation Galilean Jewish-Christian movement, whose people would have preserved Jesus’s sayings orally before they were translated into Greek and written down.



5 Sinners, tax collectors, and gentiles

Eating with sinners; parables; foraging on the sabbath

Mark 2:15 He was reclining at the table in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners sat down with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many, and they followed him. The scribes and the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why is it that he eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?”

When Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Matthew, characteristically, feels the need to back up this secular proverb with a quotation from scripture. Such references are rarer in Mark. [2110](#)

Parable of the lost sheep

Luke 15:1 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming close to him to hear him. The Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them."

He told them this parable: "Which of you men, if you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them, wouldn't leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that was lost, until he found it? When he has found it, he carries it on his shoulders, rejoicing. When he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'³⁷

Parable of the prodigal son

Luke 15:11 He said, "A certain man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of your property.' So he divided his livelihood between them. Not many days after, the younger son gathered all of this together and traveled into a far country. There he wasted his property with riotous living. When he had spent all of it, there arose a severe famine in that country, and he began to be in need. He went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He wanted to fill his belly with the pods that the pigs ate, but no one gave him any. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough to spare, and I'm dying with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will tell him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no more worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants." '

"He arose and came to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and ran, fell on his neck, and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

³⁷Luke finishes by making the allegory explicit, then in 15:8 follows up with a second, closely parallel parable about a lost coin.

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let’s eat and celebrate; for this, my son, was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.’ Then they began to celebrate.

“Now his elder son was in the field. As he came near to the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants to him and asked what was going on. He said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and healthy.’ But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and begged him. But he answered his father, ‘Behold, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed a commandment of yours, but you never gave me a goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this your son came, who has devoured your living with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’

“He said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But it was appropriate to celebrate and be glad, for this, your brother, was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, and is found.’”

Parable of the bridegroom

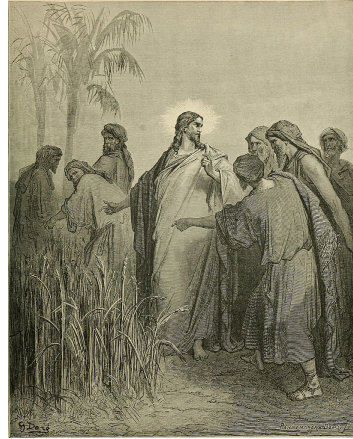
Mark 2:18 John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and they came and asked him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples don’t fast?”

Jesus said to them, “Can the groomsmen fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they can’t fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, or else the patch shrinks and the new tears away from the old, and a worse hole is made. No one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the skins, and the wine pours out,

and the skins will be destroyed; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins."

John was an ascetic; Jesus rejects John's asceticism, but retains an antimaterialist slant.



Foraging on the sabbath

Mark 2:23 He was going on the sabbath day through the grain fields; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Behold, why do they do that which is not lawful on the sabbath day?"

He said to them, "Did you never read what David did when he had need and was hungry—he, and those who were with him? How he entered into God's house at the time of Abiathar the high priest,³⁸ and ate the show bread, which is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and gave also to those who were with him?"

He said to them, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. Therefore man³⁹ is lord even of the sabbath."

³⁸Mark is mistaken, since 1 Samuel 21:1 refers to Ahimelech, Abiathar's father.

³⁹The Greek texts have "the son of man," but here this is most likely to have

The withered hand

Mark 3:1 He entered again into the synagogue, and there was a man there whose hand was withered. They watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day, that they might accuse him. He said to the man whose hand was withered, "Stand up." He said to them, "Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good or to do harm? To save a life or to kill?" But they were silent. When he had looked around at them with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their hearts, he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored as healthy as the other. The Pharisees went out, and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.

Who is my neighbor?; the good Samaritan

Luke 10:25 ⁴⁰ Behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

He said to him, "What is written in the torah? How do you read it?"

He answered, "You shall love the lord your god with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind;⁴¹ and your neighbor as yourself."⁴²

He said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live."

But he, desiring to justify himself, asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"

been used in the generic sense in Aramaic [2104](#), not as a title.

⁴⁰The theme is reiterated with another Samaritan in Luke 17:14.

⁴¹Deuteronomy 6:5

⁴²Leviticus 19:18, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people; but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am Yahweh."



Luke 10:30 Jesus answered, "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. By chance a certain priest was going down that way. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he traveled, came where he was. When he saw him, he was moved with compassion, came to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. He set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the host, and said to him, 'Take care of him. Whatever you spend beyond that, I will repay you when I return.' Now which of these three do you think seemed to be a neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?"

He said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Compare with "Who are my mother and my brothers?," p. 56. The point of the story is not just to be nice to strangers who are in distress. It criticizes the priesthood of the Temple in Jerusalem in the strongest possible terms, by comparing them unfavorably with an ethnic group, the Samaritans, who are hated by the Jews.

It also shows that Jesus's ethic of brotherly love – although not his mission or the kingdom of God – transcends ethnic boundaries, which is a radical break with material in the Hebrew Bible such as the Book of Esther.):

The kingdom of God is only for the Jews:

But the mission of Jesus and the apostles is only for the Jews, as emphasized particularly by Matthew. Matthew has the following in the miracle story of the Syrophenician woman (p. 55):

Matthew 15:24 “I wasn’t sent to anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”⁴³

And in the commissioning of the apostles, again there is a remark recorded by Matthew but not by Mark:

Matthew 10:5 “Don’t go among the gentiles, and don’t enter into any city of the Samaritans. Rather, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

And in the sermon on the mount:

Matthew 7:6 Don’t give that which is holy to the dogs, neither throw your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

Jesus’s teachings and the kingdom of God are only for the Jews [2110](#).

6 The sermon on the mount

Matthew 5-7 is the sermon on the mount, the greatest statement of Christian ethics. [2112](#) Its contents are completely different from the rest of the gospels, which are concerned entirely

⁴³The meaning is implicit in Mark 7:27 as well.

with the coming end of the world.²¹¹² Jesus set a moral example in his itinerant lifestyle ministry, but his conduct is sometimes inconsistent with the wisdom sayings presented in this sermon.²¹¹³ I've left out some verses argued by Geza Vermes to be inauthentic. Shorter versions are found in the sermon on the plain (Luke 6:20-49) and Didache 1.

Matthew 5:1 Seeing the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

The beatitudes

Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.⁴⁴

Matthew 5:12 Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. [...]

⁴⁴The prominent and repeated concern here with persecution is unlikely to be anything expressed by Jesus, since Christianity and its often ahistorical and mythologized depiction of its own victimhood are all in the far future. Matthew may be addressing a Jewish-Christian audience's experience of strife between their Jewish sect and other Jewish sects ²¹¹³.

Matthew 5:13 You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted? It is then good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men.

Matthew 5:14 You are the light of the world. A city on a hill can't be hidden. Neither do you light a lamp and put it under a measuring basket, but on a stand; and it shines to all who are in the house. Even so, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.⁴⁵

Extending the torah

Matthew 5:17 "Don't think that I came to destroy the scripture.⁴⁶ I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill. For most certainly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter or one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the torah, until all things are accomplished. Therefore, whoever shall break one of these least commandments and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the kingdom of heaven.

"You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, 'You shall not murder;' and 'Whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I tell you that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause will be in danger of the judgment. Whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' will be in danger of the council. Whoever says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of Gehenna.

⁴⁵5:14-15 is a preview of 9:49.

⁴⁶ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται, literally "the law and the prophets." The inexact Greek word νόμος, "law," as well as terms like "walk" (Mark 7:5) and "allow," are used by the evangelists to mean several things, including the torah, the halakhah or legalistic aspects of the torah, or laws and customs in the ordinary sense. The set phrase used here means the torah plus the remainder of the Hebrew bible, i.e., the Hebrew bible or tanakh in its entirety. We don't know whether the tanakh was entirely canonicalized by Jesus's lifetime.

“If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly while you are with him on the way; lest perhaps the prosecutor deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Most certainly I tell you, you shall by no means get out of there until you have paid the last penny.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery;’ but I tell you that everyone who gazes at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna. If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna.

“It was also said, ‘Whoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorce,’ but I tell you that whoever puts away his wife, except for the cause of sexual immorality, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries her when she is put away commits adultery.

“Again you have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall perform to the lord your vows,’ but I tell you, don’t swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shall you swear by your head, for you can’t make one hair white or black. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No.’ Whatever is more than these is of the evil one.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for

a tooth.’ But I tell you, don’t resist him who is evil; but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. If anyone sues you to take away your coat, let him have your cloak also. Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and don’t turn away him who desires to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? If you only greet your friends, what more do you do than others? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

The absence of this material from Mark feels extremely strange from a modern point of view [2115](#).

Prayer

Matthew 6:1 “Be careful that you don’t do your charitable giving before men, to be seen by them, or else you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Therefore, when you do merciful deeds, don’t sound a trumpet before yourself, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may get glory from men. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you do merciful deeds, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand does, so that your merciful deeds may be in secret, then your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

“When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Most certainly, I tell you,

they have received their reward. But you, when you pray, enter into your inner room, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. In praying, don't use vain repetitions as the gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their much speaking. Therefore don't be like them, for your Father knows what things you need before you ask him. Pray like this:

Matthew 6:9 “ ‘Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.

Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.

Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

For yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.’

Matthew 6:14 “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

“Moreover when you fast, don't be like the hypocrites, with sad faces. For they disfigure their faces that they may be seen by men to be fasting. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you are not seen by men to be fasting, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.



Antimaterialism

Matthew 6:19 “Don’t lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don’t break through and steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can’t serve both God and Mammon. Therefore I tell you, don’t be anxious about your life: what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor yet for your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food, and the body more than clothing? See the birds of the sky, that they don’t sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you of much more value than they?

“Which of you by being anxious, can add one moment to his lifespan? Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They don’t toil, neither do they spin, yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today exists and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, won’t he much more clothe you, you of little faith?

“Therefore don’t be anxious, saying, ‘What will we eat?’, ‘What will we drink?’ or, ‘What will we wear?’ For the gentiles seek after all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore don’t be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day’s own evil is sufficient.

Don’t judge

Matthew 7:1 “Don’t judge, so that you won’t be judged. For with whatever judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but don’t consider the beam that is in your own eye? Or how will you tell your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye,’ and behold, the beam is in your own eye? You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother’s eye.

Wisdom sayings

“Don’t give that which is holy to the dogs, neither throw your pearls before the pigs, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

“Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. To him who knocks it will be opened. Or who is there among you who, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, who will give him a

serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! Therefore, whatever you desire for men to do to you, you shall also do to them; for this is the scripture.⁴⁷

“Enter in by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate and the way is restricted that leads to life! There are few who find it.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do you gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree produces good fruit, but the corrupt tree produces evil fruit. A good tree can’t produce evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn’t grow good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘lord, lord,’ will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven,⁴⁸ but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 7:24 “Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on a rock. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it didn’t fall, for it was founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn’t do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell—and its fall was great.”

⁴⁷ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται, a set phrase meaning the torah plus the remainder of the Hebrew bible

⁴⁸Contradicted by Paul in Romans 10:13, “Whoever will call on the name of the lord will be saved” (quoting Joel 2:32, which refers to salvation from a plague of locusts).

Matthew 7:28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them with authority, and not like the scribes.

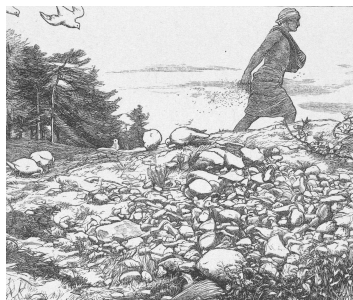
7 The kingdom of God

Mark 3:19 Then [after the commissioning of the apostles] he came into a house. The multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. When his friends heard it, they went out to seize him; for they said, “He is insane.” The scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul,” and, “By the prince of the demons he casts out the demons.”

He summoned them and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. If Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he can’t stand, but has an end. But no one can enter into the house of the strong man to plunder unless he first binds the strong man; then he will plunder his house.

“Most certainly I tell you, all sins of the descendants of man will be forgiven, including their blasphemies with which they may blaspheme; but whoever may blaspheme against the holy spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation.” –because they said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

For Mark 3:31, “Who are my mother and my brothers?,” see p. 56.



Parable of the sower

Mark 4:1 Again he began to teach by the seaside. A great multitude was gathered to him, so that he entered into a boat in the sea and sat down. All the multitude were on the land by the sea. He taught them many things in parables, and told them in his teaching, "Listen! Behold, the farmer went out to sow. As he sowed, some seed fell by the road, and the birds came and devoured it. Others fell on the rocky ground, where it had little soil, and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of soil. When the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. Others fell into the good ground and yielded fruit, growing up and increasing. Some produced thirty times, some sixty times, and some one hundred times as much." He said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear."⁴⁹

When he was alone, those who were around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. He said to them, "To you is given the mystery of God's kingdom, but to those who are outside, all things are done in parables, that 'seeing they may see and not

⁴⁹This is a stock phrase like "The End," to let a listener know the story is over, or to serve a similar marking function in the written text, which was originally WRITTENINALLCAPSWITHNOSPACES. It may have been a cultural cliché rather than an idiosyncrasy of Jesus: Funk, p. 54.

perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand, lest perhaps they should turn again, and their sins should be forgiven them."

He said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How will you understand all of the parables? The farmer sows the word. The ones by the road are the ones where the word is sown; and when they have heard, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. These in the same way are those who are sown on the rocky places, who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with joy. They have no root in themselves, but are short-lived. When oppression or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they stumble. Others are those who are sown among the thorns. These are those who have heard the word, and the cares of this age, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. Those which were sown on the good ground are those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit, some thirty times, some sixty times, and some one hundred times."

Mark 4:24 He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you; and more will be given to you who hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and he who doesn't have, even that which he has will be taken away from him."

He said, "God's kingdom is as if a man should cast seed on the earth, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, though he doesn't know how. For the earth bears fruit by itself: first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the fruit is ripe, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

He said, "How will we liken God's kingdom? Or with what parable will we illustrate it? It's like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, though it is less than all the seeds that are

on the earth, yet when it is sown, grows up and becomes greater than all the herbs, and puts out great branches, so that the birds of the sky can lodge under its shadow.”

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. Without a parable he didn’t speak to them; but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let’s go over to the other side.” Leaving the multitude, they took him with them, even as he was, in the boat. Other small boats were also with him. A big wind storm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so much that the boat was already filled. He himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and asked him, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are dying?”

He awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” The wind ceased and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? How is it that you have no faith?”

They were greatly afraid and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

The gospel of Thomas on the kingdom of God

Thomas 40 A vine has been planted without the Father – and (as) it is not vigorous, it shall be pulled up by its roots and destroyed.⁵⁰

Thomas 97 The Sovereignty of the [Father] is like a woman who is carrying a jar full of grain. (While) she was walking [on a] distant road, the handle of the jar broke, the grain streamed out behind her onto the road. She did not observe (it), she had noticed no accident. (When) she arrived in her house, she set the jar down – she found it empty.

Thomas 98 The Sovereignty of the Father is like someone who wishes to slay an eminent person. In his house he drew forth the

⁵⁰Cf. Matthew 15:13.

sword, he thrust it into the wall in order to ascertain whether his hand would prevail. Then he slew the eminent person.

The kingdom of God: imminent, already present, or coming at an unknown time?

Thomas 113 ⁵¹ It shall not come by watching (for it). They will not say ‘Behold here!’ or ‘Behold there!’ But rather the Sovereignty of the Father is spread upon the earth, and humans do not see it.

Luke 17:33 Whoever seeks to save his life loses it, but whoever loses his life preserves it.

Mark 1:14 The time is fulfilled, and God’s kingdom is at hand!

Mark 9:1 ...there are some standing here who will in no way taste death until they see God’s kingdom come with power.⁵²

Matthew 24:36 But no one knows of that day and hour, not even the angels of heaven, nor even the son,⁵³ but my father only. As the days of Noah were, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ship, and they didn’t know until the flood came and took them all away, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and one will be left. Watch therefore, for you don’t know in what hour your Lord comes. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore also be ready, for in an hour

⁵¹Luke 17:20 is similar. These verses create difficulties for any theory that the kingdom of God was conceptualized by Jesus and his followers as a purely political revolution.

⁵²Similarly in Matthew 16:27-28, Luke 9:26-27.

⁵³“Not even the son” is absent in some manuscripts.

that you don't expect, the Son of Man will come.

Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord has set over his household, to give them their food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his lord finds doing so when he comes. Most certainly I tell you that he will set him over all that he has. But if that evil servant should say in his heart, 'My lord is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eat and drink with the drunkards, the lord of that servant will come in a day when he doesn't expect it and in an hour when he doesn't know it, and will cut him in pieces and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. That is where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be.

Summary of material about the kingdom of God: [2116](#).

8 Healing miracles; hardships of the apostles

Mark 5-6 describes a series of miracles, as well as Jesus's instructions to the apostles, some nonspecific description of his preaching and solitary meditation, and indications of the extreme hardships faced by Jesus and the apostles. Here I present the healing miracles in full, but only briefly summarize the other miracles, which are ahistorical by my criteria.

The Gadarene swine

Mark 5:1 They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.⁵⁴ When he had come out of the boat, immediately a man with an unclean spirit met him out of the tombs. He lived in the tombs. Nobody could bind him any more, not even with chains, because he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him, and the fetters

⁵⁴This is in the gentile region of Decapolis, the ten cities.

broken in pieces. Nobody had the strength to tame him. Always, night and day, in the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out, and cutting himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and bowed down to him, and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have I to do with you, Jesus, you Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, don't torment me." For he said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!"

He asked him, "What is your name?"

He said to him, "My name is Legion, for we are many." He begged him much that he would not send them away out of the country. Now on the mountainside there was a great herd of pigs feeding.⁵⁵ All the demons begged him, saying, "Send us into the pigs, that we may enter into them."

At once Jesus gave them permission. The unclean spirits came out and entered into the pigs. The herd of about two thousand rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and they were drowned in the sea.⁵⁶

Jairus' daughter

Mark 5:21 When Jesus had crossed back over in the boat to the other side,⁵⁷ a great multitude was gathered to him; and he was by the sea. Behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, came; and seeing him, he fell at his feet and begged him much, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Please come and lay your hands on her, that she may be made healthy, and live."

He went with him, and a great multitude followed him, and they pressed upon him on all sides. A certain woman who had a dis-

⁵⁵There are herds of pigs because this is a gentile area. The whole story is set up to combine as many different sources as possible of ritual uncleanness, including gentiles, pigs, dead bodies, and unclean spirits. In modern terms, this is like a horror story about a stereotyped haunted house.

⁵⁶Mark 5:14-20 is excluded as an example of a garbled elaboration [2119](#).

⁵⁷back in Jewish territory, in Galilee

charge of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things by many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better, but rather grew worse, having heard the things concerning Jesus, came up behind him in the crowd and touched his clothes. For she said, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.

Immediately Jesus, perceiving in himself that the power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

His disciples said to him, "You see the multitude pressing against you, and you say, 'Who touched me?'"

He looked around to see her who had done this thing. But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had been done to her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.

He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be cured of your disease."

While he was still speaking, people came from the synagogue ruler's house, saying, "Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher any more?"

But Jesus, when he heard the message spoken, immediately said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Don't be afraid, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. He came to the synagogue ruler's house, and he saw an uproar, weeping, and great wailing. When he had entered in, he said to them, "Why do you make an uproar and weep? The child is not dead, but is asleep."

They ridiculed him. But he, having put them all out, took the father of the child, her mother, and those who were with him, and went in where the child was lying. Taking the child by the hand, he said to her, "Talitha cumi!" which means, being inter-

preted, "Girl, I tell you, get up!" Immediately the girl rose up and walked, for she was twelve years old. They were amazed with great amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and commanded that something should be given to her to eat.

Mark 6:8 ⁵⁸ He commanded [the twelve] that they should take nothing for their journey, except a staff only: no bread, no knapsack, no money in their purse, but to wear sandals, and not put on two tunics.⁵⁹ He said to them, "Wherever you enter into a house, stay there until you depart from there. Whoever will not receive you nor hear you, as you depart from there, shake off the dust that is under your feet for a testimony against them. Assuredly, I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!"⁶⁰

They went out and preached that people should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed many with oil who were sick and healed them.

Mark 6:14-29 inserts a mythologized account of the killing of John the Baptist.

Mark 6:30-46 is the miracle of the loaves and fishes, which is clearly a rehash of 2 Kings 42-44, including various details.

Mark 6:47-52 describes Jesus walking on water, possibly modeled

⁵⁸Mark 6:7 repeats the commissioning of the apostles in 3:15 in order to set up the memorable "shake off the dust" saying, which makes more sense in the context of 6:1-6, Jesus's rejection in Nazareth.

⁵⁹The apostles are not supposed to carry a knapsack because they expect that God will provide food for them wherever they go. Crossan, pp. 115-117, thinks the forbidden items are the stereotyped uniform of Cynics, with whom they could be confused because of their countercultural lifestyle, antiauthoritarianism, and dispensing of wisdom sayings. Cf. Funk, p. 63.

⁶⁰The folk saying about shaking off the dust, which prescribes mildly forgetting mistreatment, is transformed by the following sentence into a fearsome judgment to be rendered by the apostles as Jesus's deputies. Matthew 10:5 also has a command not to go among the gentiles. See p. 35.

on Job 9:8. Then:

Mark 6:53 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. When they had come out of the boat, immediately the people recognized him, and ran around that whole region, and began to bring those who were sick on their mats to where they heard he was. Wherever he entered—into villages, or into cities, or into the country—they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might just touch the fringe of his garment; and as many as touched him were made well.

Later, in Mark 8:1-38, the miracle of the loaves and fishes is recapitulated. Afterward,

Mark 8:10 Immediately he entered into the boat with his disciples and came into the region of Dalmanutha. The Pharisees came out and began to question him, seeking from him a sign from heaven and testing him. He sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation seek a sign? Most certainly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation.”

Yet again his followers again complain that they want bread.

Mark 8:13 Why do you reason that it’s because you have no bread? Don’t you perceive yet or understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, don’t you see? Having ears, don’t you hear?

9 Abolishing the Levitical purity laws; healing gentiles

Thomas 89 Jesus said, “Why do you wash the outside of the chalice? Do you not comprehend that He who creates the inside,

is also He who creates the outside?"⁶¹

Mark 7:1 Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered together to him, having come from Jerusalem. Now when they saw some of his disciples eating bread with defiled, that is unwashed, hands, they found fault. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews don't eat unless they wash their hands and forearms, holding to the tradition of the elders. After going to the marketplace, they wash first before eating. And they have many other customs, such as washing their cups, pitchers, bronze vessels, and couches.) The Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why don't your disciples live⁶² according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with unwashed hands?"

He answered them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. They worship me in vain, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'⁶³

In Mark 7:8-13 Jesus goes off on legalistic tangent that is omitted by Matthew 15.

Mark 7:14 He called all the multitude to himself and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand. There is nothing from outside of the man that going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of the man are those that defile the man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"

When he had entered into a house away from the multitude, his disciples asked him about the parable. He said to them, "Are you also without understanding? Don't you perceive that whatever goes into the man from outside can't defile him, because

⁶¹Cf. Mark 23:25, which the Jesus Seminar consider less likely to be authentic.

⁶²Περὶπατοῦσιν, "walk." The Greek word is chosen because of the connection to halakhah, meaning the legal precepts of the torah, which is derived from "halakh," to walk.

⁶³Isaiah 29:13

it doesn't go into his heart, but into his stomach, then into the latrine, making all foods clean?" He said, "That which comes out of the man, that defiles the man. For from within, out of the hearts of men, come evil thoughts, adulteries, sexual sins, murders, thefts, covetings, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile the man."

In Mark 7:24-37, Jesus heals gentiles. The Canaanites are described in Joshua as an enemy race, to be exterminated. Purifying someone of an unclean spirit is not something the Temple in Jerusalem would do for a Canaanite.

The Syrophoenician woman's daughter

Mark 7:24 From there he arose and went away into the borders of Tyre and Sidon. He entered into a house and didn't want anyone to know it, but he couldn't escape notice. For a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, having heard of him, came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a gentile,⁶⁴ a Syrophoenician [Canaanite] by race. She begged him that he would cast the demon out of her daughter.⁶⁵ But Jesus said to her, "Let the children [of the household where he was staying] eat first, for it is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."⁶⁶

But she answered him, "Yes, lord. Yet even the little dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

He said to her, "For this saying, go your way. The demon has gone

⁶⁴Ελληνίς, literally a Greek or Greek-speaker

⁶⁵Here Matthew 15:24 inserts "I wasn't sent to anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

⁶⁶Κυνάρτιος can mean puppies, but here means small dogs, the kind that unclean gentiles might allow inside. The cultural implication is probably not that Jesus likes puppies but rather a brutal slur, something like "the dirty little gentile b----es." [2120](#)

The Syrophoenician woman is the only person in the gospels ever to beat Jesus in an oral argument.

out of your daughter.”

She went away to her house, and found the child having been laid on the bed, with the demon gone out.

The deaf-mute of Decapolis

Mark 7:31 Again he departed from the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and came to the sea of Galilee through the middle of the region of Decapolis. They brought to him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech. They begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside from the multitude privately and put his fingers into his ears; and he spat and touched his tongue. Looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha!” that is, “Be opened!” Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was released, and he spoke clearly. Jesus commanded them that they should tell no one, but the more he commanded them, so much the more widely they proclaimed it. They were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He makes even the deaf hear and the mute speak!”

10 Social teachings

The family

Mark 3:31 ⁶⁷ His mother and his brothers came, and standing outside, they sent to him, calling him. A multitude was sitting around him, and they told him, “Behold, your mother, your brothers, and your sisters are outside looking for you.”

He answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Looking around at those who sat around him, he said, “Behold, my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God is my brother, my sister, and mother.”

⁶⁷This occurs in Mark in the middle of material about the kingdom of God, p. 44.

Jesus radically attacks the traditional structure of the family. Compare with “Who is my neighbor?,” p. 33.

Divorce

Mark 10:1 He arose from there and came into the borders of Judea and beyond the Jordan. Multitudes came together to him again. As he usually did, he was again teaching them.

Pharisees came to him testing him, and asked him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

He answered, “What did Moses command you?”

They said, “Moses allowed a certificate of divorce to be written, and to divorce her.”

But Jesus said to them, “For your hardness of heart, he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female. For this cause a man will leave his father and mother, and will join to his wife, and the two will become one flesh, so that they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

In the house, his disciples asked him again about the same matter. He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. If a woman herself divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”⁶⁸

Mark 8:27 through the end of Mark 10 intersperses several kinds of material: a revelation that Jesus is the messiah, miraculous healings, and social teachings. I omit the messianic material because it doesn’t meet my criteria for inclusion [286](#).

Children

⁶⁸Matthew 19:1-12 modifies Mark by adding an exception for a man whose wife has been unfaithful, deleting the discussion of a woman divorcing her husband, and discussing eunuchs and whether it is better not to marry at all. Funk, p. 220, speculates that the discussion of eunuchs is meant by Jesus to undo the torah’s pronouncements that marginalized this group.

Mark 9:33 He came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing among yourselves on the way?” But they were silent, for they had disputed with one another on the way about who was the greatest. He sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, “If any man wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.” He took a little child and set him in the middle of them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever receives one such little child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, doesn’t receive me, but him who sent me.”

Mark 10:13 They were bringing to him little children, that he should touch them, but the disciples rebuked those who were bringing them. When Jesus saw it, he was moved with indignation and said to them, “Allow the little children to come to me! Don’t forbid them, for God’s kingdom belongs to such as these. Most certainly I tell you, whoever will not receive God’s kingdom like a little child, he will in no way enter into it.” He took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Humility; the great and the poor

Mark 10:17 As he was going out into the way, one ran to him, knelt before him, and asked him, “Rabboni [my great master],⁶⁹ what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”

Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me great? No one is great except one-God.⁷⁰ You know the commandments: ‘Do not mur-

⁶⁹An obsequious form of address for a teacher. A teacher was customarily addressed as rabbi, which means “my master.” Mark does use the transliteration ραββουνι in later in this chapter, but here, because the dialog revolves around word-play, he uses the Greek equivalent διδάσκαλε ἀγαθέ so that his Greek-speaking audience can get the sense of what is being discussed. The word ἀγαθέ, referring to a person, has the primary meaning of “noble,” “great,” or “brave.” It can also mean “good,” but that would be the primary meaning of “καλός.”

⁷⁰Most English translations use “good,” which makes the meaning jarring and gives the dialog the sound of a Socratic dialog on “what is the good,” which would not have been an idiomatic form of discourse for Jesus. In either case, Jesus shows his characteristic humility and his distaste for fancy titles.

der,' 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not give false testimony,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and mother.'"

He said to him, "Teacher, I have observed all these things from my youth."

Jesus looking at him loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me, taking up the cross."

But the man's face fell at that saying, and he went away sorrowful, for he was one who had great possessions.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it is for those who have riches to enter into God's kingdom!"

The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus answered again, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter into God's kingdom! It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into God's kingdom."

They were exceedingly astonished, saying to him, "Then who can be saved?"

Jesus, looking at them, said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God." Peter began to tell him, "Behold, we have left all and have followed you."

Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, "Most certainly I tell you that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on the throne of his glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."⁷¹

Mark 10:29 Jesus said, "Most certainly I tell you, there is no one who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or land, for my sake, and for the sake of the

⁷¹Mark omits this, possibly due to embarrassment at Jesus's error of including Judas in the promise.

good news, but he will receive one hundred times more now in this time: houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and land, with persecutions; and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

11 The assault on the Temple

Entering Jerusalem

John 2:13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Jesus is at this point a backwoods preacher unknown to the Jerusalem regime.²¹²² The assault on the Temple is framed by a metaphorical story about a fig tree, which represents the Temple.

Mark 11:12 The next day, when they had come out from Bethany, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came to see if perhaps he might find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. Jesus told it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" and his disciples heard it.



Attacking the Temple

Mark 11:15 They came to Jerusalem, and Jesus entered into the Temple and began to throw out those who sold and those who

bought in the Temple, and overthrew the money changers' tables and the seats of those who sold the doves.⁷² He would not allow anyone to carry goods through the Temple. He taught, saying to them, "Isn't it written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations?' But you have made it a den of robbers!"⁷³



Mark 11:18 The chief priests and the scribes heard it, and sought how they might destroy him. For they feared him, because all the multitude was astonished at his teaching.

Mark 11:19 When evening came, he went out of the city. As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away from the roots. Peter, remembering, said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered away."

The following incident, Mark 11:27, is another visit to the Temple. The Egerton papyrus also describes an incident, Egerton 1, in which Jesus debates Jewish rulers about a legal matter, presumably at the Temple in Jerusalem. There is an angry crowd, and

⁷²We don't know whether Jesus acted alone or at the head of a mob. John 2:15 adds luridness by having Jesus use a makeshift whip, although it's unclear whether John wants to say that Jesus uses the whip against humans or only against sheep and oxen; see Croy, 2009, doi:10.2307/25610203. John's pattern of attributing heightened violence to the movement's leaders is also seen in 18:10, where he attributes an act of violence to Simon Peter.

⁷³"Den of robbers" is meant to parallel Jeremiah 7:11, not to suggest that Jesus was upset primarily because of economic exploitation or white-collar crime.

Jesus's opponents try to arrest him. There is a scuffle, but Jesus escapes. All the coming and going to the Temple with impunity may seem hard to believe, especially if the authorities were now so intent on killing Jesus, but see the note on time and place [298](#).

Debating the pharisees

Mark 11:27 They came again to Jerusalem, and as he was walking in the Temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him, and they began saying to him, "By what authority do you do these things? Or who gave you this authority to do these things?"

Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John—was it from heaven, or from men? Answer me."

They reasoned with themselves, saying, "If we should say, 'From heaven;' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' If we should say, 'From men'—they feared the people, for all held John to really be a prophet. They answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

The version of this discourse presented here is Mark's. Matthew 21:23-27 has a different version with a longer and much more direct attack on the scribes and Pharisees. The following fragment helps to explain Jesus's motivation for his earlier physical assault (Matthew 21):



The high priest sacrifices a goat on the altar of

Matthew 23:16 “Woe to you, you blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the Temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the Temple, he is obligated.’ You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the Temple that sanctifies the gold? And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obligated?’ You blind fools! For which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

Mark 12:1 He began to speak to [the priests] in parables.

Parable of the banquet

Thomas 64 ⁷⁴ Jesus said, “A person had guests. And when he had prepared the banquet, he sent his slave to summon the guests. He went to the first and said, ‘My master invites you.’ He replied, ‘I owe some money to some merchants; they are coming to me towards evening, I will go to place an order with them—I beg to be excused from the banquet.’

He went to another and said, ‘My master has invited you.’ He replied, ‘I have bought a house and they require me for a day, I’m too busy.’

He came to another and said, ‘My master invites you.’ He replied, ‘My friend is to be married and I will arrange a feast; I will not be able to come—I beg to be excused from the banquet.’

⁷⁴Matthew 22:1, Luke 14:15. Matthew makes the comparison with the kingdom of heaven explicit.

He went to another and said, 'My master invites you.' He replied, 'I have bought a villa; I go to receive the rent, I will not be able to come—I beg to be excused.'

The slave returned and said to his master: 'All the people you invited to the banquet have asked to be excused.' The master said, 'Go out to the roads, and bring whoever you find to the feast.'"

Parable of the shrewd manager

Luke 16:1 He also said to his disciples, "There was a certain rich man who had a manager. An accusation was made to him that this man was wasting his possessions. He called him, and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'

"The manager said within himself, 'What will I do, seeing that my lord is taking away the management position from me? I don't have strength to dig. I am ashamed to beg. I know what I will do, so that when I am removed from management, they may receive me into their houses.' Calling each one of his lord's debtors to him, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe to my lord?' He said, 'A hundred batos of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'How much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred cors of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'

"His lord commended the dishonest manager because he had done wisely[...]"

Parable of the vineyard

Thomas 65 ⁷⁵ Jesus said, "A kind person had a vineyard. He gave it out to cultivators, so that they would work it and he would

⁷⁵Matthew 20 makes the allegory to the kingsom of heaven explicit, and has Jesus telling the story on the way to Jerusalem. Mark 12:1 has it being told to the pharisees inside the Temple, elaborates the story, and makes the allegory explicit, with the pharisees being the murderous tenant farmers. He then ties it in to their angry reaction in 12:12.

receive its fruit from them. He sent his slave, so that the tenants would give to him the fruit of the vineyard. They seized his slave, they beat him—a little more and they would have killed him. The slave went, he told it to his master. His master said: Perhaps they did not recognize him. He sent another slave—the tenants beat him also. Then the owner sent his son. He said: Perhaps they will obey my son. Since those tenants knew that he was the heir of the vineyard, they seized him, they killed him.”

Mark 12:12 They tried to seize him, but they feared the multitude; for they perceived that he spoke the parable against them. They left him and went away.

Render unto Caesar

Mark 12:13 They sent some of the Pharisees and the Herodians to him, that they might trap him with words. When they had come, they asked him, “Teacher, we know that you are honest, and don’t defer to anyone; for you aren’t partial to anyone, but truly teach the way of God. Is it allowed⁷⁶ to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?” But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, “Why do you test me? Bring me a denarius, that I may see it.” They brought it. He said to them, “Whose is this image and inscription?” They said to him, “Caesar’s.” Jesus answered them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” They marveled greatly at him.

Debating Sadducees on the resurrection

Mark 12:18 Some Sadducees, who say that there is no resurrection, came to him.⁷⁷ They asked him, saying, “Teacher, Moses

⁷⁶ἐξεστιν, from context meaning allowed under the halakha, or legalistic part of the torah

⁷⁷Apocalypticism was a common current of religious thought among Jews of this era, and part of their conceptual picture was the idea that when God brought the final judgment, he would judge not just the living but also the dead. Hence the dead should be raised. Josephus, a Pharisee, confirms that the Sadducees didn’t believe in a resurrection. Sources conflict about whether Pharisees had a

wrote to us, 'If a man's brother dies and leaves a wife behind him, and leaves no children, that his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother.' There were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and dying left no offspring. The second took her, and died, leaving no children behind him. The third likewise; and the seven took her and left no children. Last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be of them? For the seven had her as a wife."

Jesus answered them, "Isn't this because you are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they will rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But about the dead, that they are raised, haven't you read in the book of Moses about the Bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are therefore badly mistaken."

The greatest commandments

Mark 12:28 One of the scribes came and heard them questioning together, and knowing that he had answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the greatest of all?"

Jesus answered, "The greatest is: 'Hear, Israel, the lord our God, the lord is one. You shall love the lord your god with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. The second is like this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The scribe said to him, "Truly, teacher, you have said well that he is one, and there is none other but he; and to love him with all the heart, with all the understanding, all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

standardized belief about such things, or what they believed.

When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from God’s kingdom.”⁷⁸

Mark 12:34-13:2 are obvious later interpolations, with references to Christ and a prefiguring of the destruction of the Temple in the First Jewish–Roman War, which is retrodicted to be a prophecy of Daniel (the “abomination of desolation”).

12 Jesus’s last days

A plot against Jesus

Mark 14:1 It was now two days before the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread, and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might seize him by deception and kill him. For they said, “Not during the feast, because there might be a riot among the people.”

Mark 14:3-9 prefigures the crucifixion and announces Jesus as the messiah with an incident in which a woman pours a large jar of expensive ointment over his head. (“Messiah” and “Christ” mean “anointed one.”)⁷⁹

Matthew 26:14 Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him to you?” So they weighed out for him thirty pieces of silver. From that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

Preparations for the Passover

Passover celebrates the Jews’ escape from Egypt, after which they return to reconquer the Promised Land. This makes it inherently political and symbolic for Jews living under Roman imperial rule. Josephus records civil disturbances during Passover.

⁷⁸This is one of the few positive references to scribes in the gospels. Cf. Luke 13:31, p. 19, in which Pharisees are the good guys.

⁷⁹Cf. Luke 7:36-8:3, p. 21

Mark 14:12 On the first day of unleavened bread, when they sacrificed the Passover,⁸⁰ his disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and prepare that you may eat the Passover?”

In Mark 14:13-16, Jesus prophesies how they will find the right house, and his disciples prepare the Passover there.



The last supper

Mark 14:17 When it was evening he came with the twelve.

John 13:1-20 now has Jesus wash his disciples' feet, then give a long discourse, but there is no description of a first eucharist and only a fleeting mention of a meal in 13:1-2.

Mark 14:18 As they sat and were eating, Jesus said, “Most certainly I tell you, one of you will betray me—he who eats with me.”

They began to be sorrowful, and to ask him one by one, “Surely not I?” And another said, “Surely not I?”

He answered them, “It is one of the twelve, he who dips with me in the dish. For the Son of Man goes as it is written about him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be better for that man if he had not been born.”

⁸⁰John contradicts Mark by putting the crucifixion the day before the Passover meal.

Mark 14:22-25 has Jesus initiating the apostles into a eucharistic ceremony that was actually developed much later⁸¹ and that contains Hellenistic elements, such as blood drinking, that would have been anathema to Jesus and the apostles as Jews. The following is a form of the eucharist that is probably earlier and, while still anachronistic, may be less distant from something that Jesus could have performed.

Didache 9 Now concerning the giving of thanks,⁸² give thanks this way. First, concerning the cup: We thank you, our father, for the holy vine of your servant David, which you made known to us through your servant Jesus. Glory to you forever.

And concerning the broken bread: We thank you, our father, for the life and knowledge which you made known to us through your servant Jesus. Glory to you forever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom, for your is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.⁸³

Didache 10 But after you are filled, give thanks this way:

We thank you, holy father, for your holy name which you caused to dwell in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality, which you made known to us through your servant Jesus. Glory to you forever. You, master almighty, created all things for your name's sake. You gave food and drink to men for enjoy-

⁸¹Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, pp. 360ff.

⁸²τῆς εὐχαριστίας, hence "eucharist"

⁸³Didache 9 continues with a prohibition against offering the eucharist to those who haven't been baptized, citing Jesus's words, "Don't give that which is holy to the dogs." In Matthew 7:6 this probably means not to spread the mission to the gentiles, so the Didache has changed the exclusion of gentiles into the exclusion of the unbaptized. In general, we don't know whether Matthew draws from the Didache (as argued controversially by Garrow), the Didache from Matthew, both, or neither (but with both drawing from some source such as Q).

ment, that they might give thanks to you. But to us you freely gave spiritual food and drink and life eternal through your servant. Before all things we thank you that you are mighty. Glory to you forever.⁸⁴

Mark 14:26 When they had sung a hymn,⁸⁵ they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of me tonight, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' However, after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee."

But Peter said to him, "Although all will fall away, yet I will not."

Jesus said to him, "Most certainly I tell you that you today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times."

But Peter spoke all the more, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." They all said the same thing.

Gethsemane

Mark 14:32 They came to a place which was named Gethsemane.⁸⁶ He said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be greatly troubled and distressed.⁸⁷ He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch."⁸⁸

⁸⁴Didache 10 continues with a prayer for the safety of the church.

⁸⁵continuing to model a later Christian worship ceremony

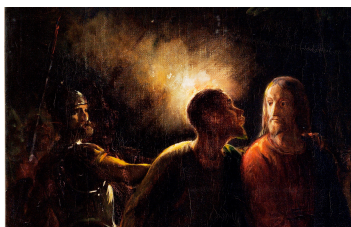
⁸⁶Literally "oil press," an olive grove.

⁸⁷In Luke's telling, Jesus is serene and remains so until his death, modeling how to be a dignified martyr as described in Acts. (Luke 22:43-44 are probably a later antidocetic addition.)

⁸⁸Mark 14:35-36 describes a prayer that could not actually have been witnessed and recorded, and that uses the anachronistic symbolism of the eucharistic cup, which has already been introduced in 10:38 and 14:23. Compare Didache 9, Jeremiah 25:15, and Revelation 14:8 and 14:10.

Mark 14:37 He came back and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “Simon, are you sleeping? Couldn’t you watch one hour? Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. Again he returned and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they didn’t know how to answer him. He came the third time and said to them, “Sleep on now, and take your rest. It is enough. The hour has come. Behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise! Let’s get going. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand.”



Jesus’s arrest

Mark 14:43 Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came—and with him a multitude with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Now he who betrayed him had given them a sign, saying, “Whomever I will kiss, that is he. Seize him, and lead him away safely.” When he had come, immediately he went to him and said, “Rabbi! Rabbi!” and kissed him. They laid their hands on him and seized him. But a certain one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.⁸⁹

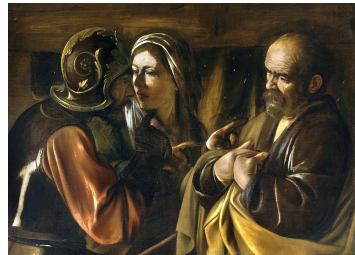
⁸⁹John 18:10 identifies the sword wielder as Simon Peter. John’s pattern of attributing heightened violence to the movement’s leaders is also seen in 2:15, where he has Jesus use a whip in the assault on the Temple. In Luke 22:51, Jesus heals the ear. Matthew 26:52 has Jesus reproving the anonymous swordsman by saying, “All those who take the sword will die by the sword.”

Mark 14:48 Jesus answered them, “Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to seize me? I was daily with you in the Temple teaching, and you didn’t arrest me. But this is so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.”

They all left him, and fled. A certain young man followed him, having a linen cloth thrown around himself over his naked body. The young men grabbed him, but he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked. They led Jesus away to the high priest. All the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes came together with him.

Mark 14:54 Peter had followed him from a distance, until he came into the court of the high priest. He was sitting with the officers, and warming himself in the light of the fire.

Mark 14:55-64 gives an account of a trial before the Sanhedrin, which cannot be historical for a variety of reasons,⁹⁰ and also meets my criteria for exclusion (286) because of material about destroying and rebuilding the Temple.



Peter’s denial

Mark 14:66 As Peter was in the courtyard below, one of the maids of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, “You were also with the Nazarene, Jesus!”

⁹⁰Aslan, pp. 156-158; Funk, pp. 121-122.

But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are saying." He went out on the porch, and the rooster crowed.

The maid saw him and began again to tell those who stood by, "This is one of them." But he again denied it. After a little while again those who stood by said to Peter, "You truly are one of them, for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it." But he began to curse and to swear, "I don't know this man of whom you speak!"

The rooster crowed the second time. Peter remembered the words that Jesus said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." When he thought about that, he wept.

Mark 15:1 Immediately in the morning the chief priests, with the elders, scribes, and the whole council, held a consultation, bound Jesus, carried him away, and delivered him up to Pilate.⁹¹

Pontius Pilate

Pontius Pilate is described by the Jewish historians Philo and Josephus. Factoring out their vitriolic sentiments, the general portrait they paint of him is of a Roman ruler who is manipulative but not venal, measured in his violence, and loyal to Rome. He is chauvinistic toward the Jews, and would have overseen many routine crucifixions. The following extract is from a letter, recorded by Philo, from the Jewish king Agrippa I. The incident it records, which probably happened right around the time of Jesus's crucifixion, is typical of Pilate's recorded interactions with the Jews of Jerusalem.

Pilate was one of the emperor's lieutenants, having been appointed governor of Judaea. He, not more with the object of doing honour to Tiberius than with that of vexing the multitude, dedicated some gilt shields in the palace of Herod, in the holy city; which had no form nor any other forbidden thing represented on them except some necessary inscription, which mentioned these

⁹¹Pontius Pilate, Roman governor of Judea

two facts, the name of the person who had placed them there, and the person in whose honour they were so placed there.⁹²

But when the multitude heard what had been done, and when the circumstance became notorious, then the people, putting forward the four sons of the king, who were in no respect inferior to the kings themselves, in fortune or in rank, and his other descendants, and those magistrates who were among them at the time, entreated him to alter and to rectify the innovation which he had committed in respect of the shields; and not to make any alteration in their national customs, which had hitherto been preserved without any interruption, without being in the least degree changed by any king of emperor.

But when he steadfastly refused this petition (for he was a man of a very inflexible disposition, and very merciless as well as very obstinate), they cried out: "Do not cause a sedition; do not make war upon us; do not destroy the peace which exists. The honour of the emperor is not identical with dishonour to the ancient laws; let it not be to you a pretence for heaping insult on our nation. Tiberius is not desirous that any of our laws or customs shall be destroyed. And if you yourself say that he is, show us either some command from him, or some letter, or something of the kind, that we, who have been sent to you as ambassadors, may cease to trouble you, and may address our supplications to your master."

Trial

Mark 15:2 Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

He answered, "So you say."

The chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer? See how many things they testify against you!"

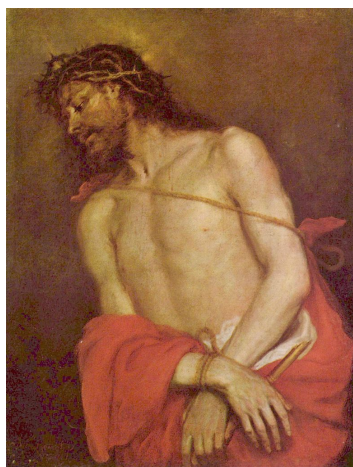
⁹²They probably included the inscription "son of divine Augustus," meaning Tiberius.

But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate marveled.

Luke 23 gives an account of a complicated and drawn-out legal proceeding, which is unlikely to be historical for the trial of a poor and obscure subversive. Tacitus (quoted at greater length on p. 83) confirms Jesus's execution at the hands of Pontius Pilate:

Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our [prefects⁹³], Pontius Pilatus ...

In Mark 15:6-14 Pilate pardons the robber Barabbas rather than Jesus. This episode is unlikely to be historical. The depiction of Pilate as wavering and lacking ill will is designed to make Christianity palatable to Romans.⁹⁴



Mark 15:15 [Pilate] handed over Jesus, when he had flogged him, to be crucified.

⁹³Tacitus actually refers to Pilate as a procurator, which is probably just a mistake.

⁹⁴Aslan, p. 148; Crossan, p. 141

The soldiers led him away within the court, which is the Praetorium; and they called together the whole cohort. They clothed him with purple; and weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on him. They began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed and spat on him, and bowing their knees, did homage to him. When they had mocked him, they took the purple cloak off him, and put his own garments on him. They led him out to crucify him.

They compelled a man passing by, coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to go with them that he might bear his cross. They brought him to the place called Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, "The place of a skull." They offered him wine mixed with myrrh to drink, but he didn't take it.⁹⁵

Mark 15:25 It was morning when they crucified him. The superscription of his accusation was written over him: "THE KING OF THE JEWS." With him they crucified two robbers, one on his right hand, and one on his left.⁹⁶

Mark 15:31 Likewise the chief priests mocking among themselves with the scribes said, "He saved others. He can't save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, that we may see and believe him." Those who were crucified with him also insulted him.

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until mid-afternoon. At that hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is, being interpreted, "My God, my

⁹⁵Mark 15:24 has the soldiers casting lots for Jesus's clothes. This is probably a detail fabricated to echo Psalms 22:18. It doesn't actually make sense that the soldiers would covet the humble clothing of a working-class criminal so much.

⁹⁶Mark 28:30 then has: The Scripture was fulfilled which says, "He was counted with transgressors." Those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads and saying, "Ha! You who destroy the Temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!"

God, why have you forsaken me?"⁹⁷

Some of those who stood by, when they heard it, said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah."

One ran, and filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Let him be. Let's see whether Elijah comes to take him down."

Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and gave up the spirit. The veil of the Temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. When the centurion, who stood by opposite him, saw him cry out and breathe his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"



Mark 15:40 There were also women watching from afar, among whom were both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; who, when he was in Galilee,

⁹⁷ Different gospels record different words spoken by Jesus, the only agreement being this lament, which is given in both Mark and Matthew 27:46. Jesus quotes Psalms 22:1, in Aramaic. In all versions, his words on the cross are from scripture. Some versions of Luke 23:34 give "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they do," while others omit it. Ehrman speculates that it was deleted for anti-Jewish reasons.

followed him and served him; and many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

All four gospels agree that whereas the men fled, a group of female disciples stayed with Jesus during his ordeal.



13 After the crucifixion

In Mark 15:42-47, Jesus is entombed with the help of a rich man who intervenes with Pilate. In reality, Jesus's body was almost certainly left to be scavenged by dogs and crows [2123](#).

In Mark 16:1-8, three women find the tomb empty. They are met by a man in a white robe, who tells them that Jesus has risen, and that they should tell Peter and the other disciples. The gospel of Mark ends abruptly:

Mark 16:8 They went out, and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had come on them. They said nothing to

anyone; for they were afraid.

The two earliest recorded versions of Mark end here, which feels abrupt and ambiguous, wouldn't have been very religiously satisfactory to Mark's audience, and also leaves some ends not tied up neatly (Mark 16:7 predicts an appearance in Galilee that never happens). N.T. Wright has suggested that this may have simply been because the gospel would originally have been written on a scroll (not a codex), and scrolls tend to get damaged and lose their beginnings and endings.

The NT records that Jesus appeared, resurrected in the flesh, to a number of his followers, and that, just as the women were the only ones to remain with him during the crucifixion, women were the first to see post-crucifixion visions. It's an interesting, but ultimately subjective and inconclusive, exercise to try to tell whether any of the resurrection appearances at all were psychologically real experiences of their witnesses. [2125](#)

The following ending appears to have been invented in order to come after Mark 16:8 and replace the lost ending of the original. (It doesn't seem to be a recovered original version, because there is no appearance in Galilee, and the style and vocabulary are different.)

Mark 16:9 Now when he had risen early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. When they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they disbelieved.

After these things he was revealed in another form to two of them as they walked, on their way into the country.

Mark 16:15-20 is excluded according to my criteria.⁹⁸

⁹⁸I exclude novel statements and commands by the resurrected Jesus, such as 16:15 broadening his mission to non-Jews. Mark 16:19, sitting by the right hand

Appearance to the apostles and other disciples

Mark 16:13 They went away and told it to the rest. They didn't believe them, either.

Afterward he was revealed to the eleven themselves as they sat at the table; and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they didn't believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

Matthew 28:8 [After finding the tomb empty, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary] departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word. As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" They came and took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid. Go tell my brothers that they should go into Galilee, and there they will see me."

Paul's account was written down before those in the gospels and Acts, but is less directly connected to witnesses' accounts from Palestine.

1 Corinthians 15:3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers at once, most of whom remain until now, but some have also fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, as to the child born at the wrong time, he appeared to me [Paul] also.⁹⁹

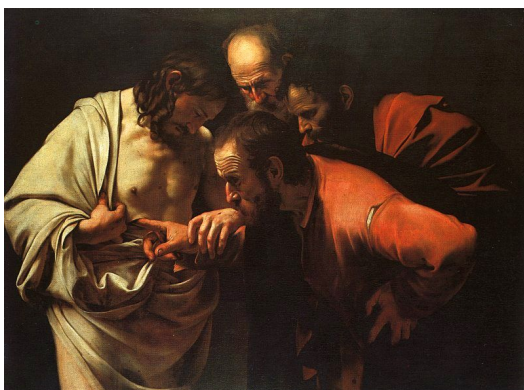
Biographical sketch of Paul: [2126](#).

of God, can't have been witnessed by anyone based on naturalistic assumptions. This section includes the basis for snake handling and drinking poison as signs of faith, which may in turn have been based on a shipwreck adventure related in Acts 28:1.

⁹⁹at his conversion on the road to Damascus

John 20:18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the lord, and that he had said these things to her. When therefore it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were locked where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the middle and said to them, "Peace be to you."

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore were glad when they saw the lord. Jesus therefore said to them again, "Peace be to you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the holy spirit! If you forgive anyone's sins, they have been forgiven them. If you retain anyone's sins, they have been retained."



John 20:24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, wasn't with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

After eight days, again his disciples were inside and Thomas was

with them. Jesus came, the doors being locked, and stood in the middle, and said, "Peace be to you." Then he said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see my hands. Reach here your hand, and put it into my side. Don't be unbelieving, but believing."

Thomas answered him, "My lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Therefore Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

Suetonius

In his 121 CE work *Lives of the Caesars*, the Roman historian Suetonius writes under the apparent belief that Jesus himself was alive and active in Rome in 49 CE:

Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, [Claudius] expelled them from Rome.

He also writes approvingly of Nero's measures to restore public order in Rome, including the (capital) punishment of the Christians around 64 CE:

During his reign many abuses were severely punished and put down, and no fewer new laws were made: a limit was set to expenditures; the public banquets were confined to a distribution of food; the sale of any kind of cooked viands in the taverns was forbidden, with the exception of pulse and vegetables, whereas before every sort of dainty was exposed for sale. Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition. He put an end to the diversions of the chariot drivers, who from immunity of long standing claimed the right of ranging at large and amusing themselves by cheating and

robbing the people. The pantomimic actors and their partisans were banished from the city.



By this time, the new religion was spreading among the gentiles of the wider Roman Empire. Although the gospels hadn't yet been written down, and it's unclear whether these new followers knew anything specific about Jesus's biography or sayings, the eucharist was practiced (1 Corinthians 10:16, written ca. 53 CE), and some of Jesus's social teachings were in force (1 Corinthians 6-8).

Tacitus

There was a great fire in 64 CE during the reign of Nero. The Roman historian wrote the following around 116 CE:

But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Chrestians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our [prefects¹⁰⁰], Pontius

¹⁰⁰Tacitus actually refers to Pilate as a procurator, which is probably just a mis-

Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.

Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.

Pliny the Younger

Pliny the Younger, governor of a province in northern Turkey, wrote a letter to the emperor Trajan asking for guidance about how to go about trying and punishing Christians. Trajan replied. The discussion was mainly about legal issues such as whether young children should be executed or whether anonymous accusations of Christianity should be investigated. Many Christians refused three times to renounce their faith, and so were executed. However, some did avoid death by consenting to curse Christ and worship a statue of Trajan. In the course of his description of these apostates, Pliny provides one of the first historical descriptions of early Christian forms of worship, probably a garbled explanation of fellowship and the eucharist:

take.

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food—but ordinary and innocent food.

Notes

21 About this document; criteria for inclusion or exclusion

I've added my own notes on points that I was originally unable to understand by reading the gospels, including some information about the political, social, and historical context. I've attempted to omit all material that, in my amateur opinion, seems to be a later overlay that would not have been recognizable to Jesus or his contemporaries. An interesting and well known amateur project along the same lines is the Thomas Jefferson Bible.

Unlike Jefferson, I include non-Christian sources and have access to the Gospel of Thomas, and I don't use scientific plausibility as a criterion to exclude what otherwise may have been real, contemporary psychological experiences. The healing miracles are there (although I omit some recaps of the same miracle), as are the appearances of the resurrected Jesus. I don't believe that Jesus had a time machine, but I leave in prophecies that are necessary in order to make sense of the story-line as told by Mark, e.g., "before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times."

1. Red flags for the no-time-machine criterion are the following motifs:

- a Christian symbolism or terminology used before they existed: (i) "Take up your cross and follow me;"¹⁰¹ (ii) John the Baptist says, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom;"¹⁰² (iii) "church;"¹⁰³ (iv) "the Jews" used as if Jesus and his followers were not Jews;¹⁰⁴ (v) symbolism of three days between the crucifixion and the resurrection;¹⁰⁵ (vi) "the Tem-

¹⁰¹Matthew 16:24, Luke 9:23

¹⁰²John 3:29

¹⁰³ἐκκλησίαν, literally "assembly" or "gathering," Matthew 16:18

¹⁰⁴John 7:1-8

¹⁰⁵Mark 14:58, Luke 2:46, John 2:19-22

ple” used as a symbol for Jesus’s body;¹⁰⁶ (vii) normal feasts used to prefigure the eucharist.¹⁰⁷

b Foreknowledge of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.¹⁰⁸

c Prophecy of betrayal and derision.¹⁰⁹

Also excluded:

2. Novel statements and commands by the resurrected Jesus (e.g., Matthew 28:19). Although some of these resurrection accounts may be real records of psychologically real experiences, naturalism requires that anything novel that Jesus says in them can only be the product of his followers’ minds.
3. Garbling or incoherence attributable to the evangelist’s agenda, often in the form of a botched elaboration at the end of a story ([2119](#)).
4. Any discourse containing material that is clearly fabricated

¹⁰⁶John 2:21

¹⁰⁷John 7:8

¹⁰⁸“I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands,” Mark 14:58, with similar examples in Mark 8:31, Mark 13:2, Mark 15:29, Luke 19:43, John 2:19, Matthew 26:61, Thomas 71, and Acts 6:14 The gospels and Acts were written down after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, so their authors are providing a retrodictive explanation of the significance of this event.

¹⁰⁹“How is it written about the Son of Man, that he should suffer many things and be despised?,” Mark 9:12. It’s possible that at some point Jesus realized he was embarking on a course of action that would result in his own destruction. But the Hebrew bible does not predict that the messiah will be betrayed, scorned, or despised. It paints him as a glorious and successful political, military, and religious leader. There was no time machine to allow the authors of the Hebrew bible to know that Jesus would be crucified. And the scriptural references don’t even make much sense as prophecies. For example, Psalms 22:1, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?,” makes sense as something Jesus would repeat on the cross, but Psalm 22 doesn’t make sense as a prophecy about a messiah who will be scorned. It contains verses such as “But I am a worm, and no man” (Psalms 22:6), which clearly aren’t meant to be about a messiah.

on the basis of the foregoing criteria (e.g., Matthew 16:24-28).

I mostly follow Mark as the gospel that is the earliest and appears to contain the smallest amount of later propaganda and theologizing. I make no attempt at completeness, and in some cases I omit incidents from the non-Mark gospels or just give a brief summary. I've attempted to retain the intelligible narrative thread of Mark, while freely rearranging some material in order to group similar material together. My criteria are arbitrary and personal, and they have the unfortunate side-effect of cutting out many wonderful and culturally familiar sayings and events, such as "Man shall not live by bread alone."

The outcome of the approach that I follow is that there is not much hint in the gospels of anything recognizable as Christianity. Jesus's biography becomes that of the radicalized healthcare worker:- Once there were two healthcare workers, John the Baptist and his pupil Jesus of Nazareth. John is beheaded, and Jesus becomes radicalized. Jesus comes to see the dysfunctional and exploitative nature of the central healthcare administration as symptomatic of a deeper rot in society. He predicts the coming of a mysterious kingdom of God (and also, by some accounts, dispenses novel ethical teachings, although not all witnesses recall this). In the end, he goes to the central hospital, goes on a violent rampage, and commits suicide by cop.

210 John's provocation

John's actions and the symbolism of the Jordan are extremely politically provocative to the Roman-Judean regime.

The Judean client regime and its centralized theocracy at the Temple in Jerusalem has its own slaves and agricultural land, but its most lucrative source of revenue is administering the complicated rituals prescribed in Leviticus, which include both ablutions by the priests and blood sacrifices. John carves out his own rogue franchise, competing with them by offering free purifica-

tion rituals.

John is not only challenging this monopoly but also (as Josephus carefully omits), by doing them in the Jordan, evoking a politically supercharged echo of the return of the Jews to the promised land:

Numbers 27:12 Yahweh said to Moses, “Go up into this mountain of Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel.”

There follows in Numbers 27-29 an extremely lengthy list of commands about animal sacrifices to be made to God once the people have been returned to the promised land. In Deuteronomy 34, God gives Moses another view of the promised land, reiterating that it is for the offspring of Abraham — i.e., in the ears of John’s followers, not to the Romans. Moses’s successor Joshua then miraculously crosses the Jordan (Joshua 6) and reconquers Canaan from the evil foreigners.

210 John’s asceticism

A strain of asceticism was one of many currents of thought that were in the air among the many contending schools of Judaism that included the Essene sect. It has been suggested that John was an Essene, but we don’t know.

210 Authenticity of John’s social teachings in Matthew

The social teachings in Luke 3:10 seem unlikely to be authentic. John preached to zealous Jews in the wilderness along the Jordan river. What were tax collectors and soldiers doing there, among that group? Tax collectors were shunned by the kind of people who would go to John, and reaching out to include them was a remarkable feature of Jesus’s mission, not John’s. There were separate Roman and Herodian militaries,¹¹⁰ but even if the soldiers were Jews (serving either Herod or, possibly, the Romans¹¹¹), it seems unlikely that they would have been free to go off on long

¹¹⁰Chilton, p. 64

¹¹¹Chilton, p. 165

hikes into the wilderness to meet up with a radical who was symbolically attacking Herodian rule. Unlike Jesus, John did not, as suggested by Luke, gather people around him to live his teachings by sharing the necessities of daily life.

212 Family background

The Nazareans in Mark 6:2 are insulting Jesus by referring to him as Mary's son. As the eldest brother, he should be referred to as Joseph's son. The implication is that he is illegitimate.¹¹² The same communal perception is stated more explicitly in John 8:41, p. 12. Another straightforward description of Jesus's family is given in Acts 1:14. The word τέκτονος, usually translated as "carpenter," can also just mean a landless manual laborer¹¹³ or be Roman slang for an ignorant peasant.¹¹⁴

213 Jesus's brother James the Just

After the crucifixion, Jesus's brother James took over his mission in Jerusalem. He managed to coexist for a long time with the Temple while beginning to build what would become the Christian church. He engaged in a bitter and long-running epistolary and in-person conflict with Paul over the direction of the movement, and especially about the extent to which the Mosaic law had to be followed. This resulted in the Council of Jerusalem in 50 CE (Acts 15). James's life, and his biological relationship to Jesus, are well documented in a number of historical sources, such as Josephus (Antiquities 20-9-1), Clement of Alexandria, and a long passage from Hegesippus quoted by Eusebius. A claimed ossuary box, publicly announced in 2002, has been the subject of vigorous academic and legal disputes.

213 Galilee

The Galileans had a reputation as flinty hill people who didn't pay their taxes and were anticlerical and resentful of Judea and the

¹¹²Aslan, p. 37

¹¹³Crossan

¹¹⁴Aslan, p. 34

Temple. Galilee produced many bandits (Greek singular ληστής), who in some cases may have had political or Robin Hood overtones.

⚡13 Nazareth

Archaeological work demonstrates that the site of the town of Nazareth saw human occupation as early as the iron age.¹¹⁵ Work by Ken Dark suggests that, unlike nearby Sepphoris, Nazareth strongly resisted incursions by foreign religions and cultures. The Nazareans left behind local styles of pottery and used limestone, which was considered especially pure in Jewish culture. There are widely varying estimates of Nazareth's size during in Jesus's lifetime, with some estimates being a population as low as a few hundred, while Dark's work suggests the existence of a fairly large town.

⚡13 Jesus's language

As child growing up in Galilee, Jesus would have spoken a dialect of Aramaic, with a distinctive accent. (In Mark 14:70 at Gethsemane, p. 73, Peter is identified as a Galilean by his accent.) The overwhelming majority of scholars believe that Jesus and his followers spoke Aramaic to one another.¹¹⁶ However, Hebrew was not yet a dead language in this time and place, and a Mishnaic Hebrew dialect is found in contemporary literary works, contracts, letters, and some of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Hebrew was probably no longer alive as a spoken language, but we don't know for sure. Aramaic and Hebrew are similar languages, and some people at the time may have "code switched" among Aramaic, Mishnaic Hebrew, and Biblical Hebrew as three different registers of speech,

¹¹⁵Y. Alexandre, "The settlement history of Nazareth in the Iron Age and early Roman period," 2020

¹¹⁶The linguist Birkeland wrote an influential article in 1954 arguing that Jesus spoke Hebrew, but this is an extreme minority opinion that few experts support. He argues that when Jesus is quoted as speaking Aramaic phrases in the gospels, it is because the rest of the time he is speaking Hebrew. A more recent discussion is given by Barr.

as we do in English when we quote a phrase from Shakespeare. However, Josephus clearly distinguishes “the Hebrew language” from “the language of our country.”

213 **Jesus’ education and ability to read**

We have no reliable evidence about whether Jesus was literate. If not, then his exposure to the Hebrew bible would have been through oral targums, singing psalms, and possibly John the Baptist. He may or may not have had a detailed familiarity with the Hebrew bible.

Many experts believe that Jesus was unable to read. Any opportunities to learn to read or write would have been extremely scarce, hence the disbelief expressed in Mark 6:2. Reading was an activity for the privileged leisure class. Jesus spent his days chopping down trees and planing boards. On the other hand, Jesus was one of the most exceptional people in history, and he may have risen above these circumstances and learned to read, like Frederick Douglass. The gospels say that Jesus did not have any formal opportunity to learn to read, and if this is true, then he must have taught himself or learned informally from someone:

John 7:15 The Jews therefore marveled, saying, “How does this man know letters, having never been educated?”¹¹⁷

There were probably no institutions similar to our modern schools. Children worked. We don’t have any clear picture of how literacy was transmitted in this culture. There must have been provisions in Jerusalem to train the scribal class, but no such thing would have existed in a tiny, backwoods town like Nazareth. What might have existed there was a synagogue.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷John has Jesus respond essentially that his knowledge comes divine inspiration.

¹¹⁸Aslan, p. 35, claims that no such synagogue existed. The synagogue at Capernaum, which the gospels record Jesus as visiting as an adult, was 40 km away. Sepphoris was much closer, and tradition has it that it is Mary’s home town. It has been speculated that Jesus worked there. However, there is evidence, including

We have at least some knowledge of what such a place would have been like, if Nazareth had one.¹¹⁹ In earlier centuries, as described in the Hebrew bible, there had been shrines and outdoor ceremonies at the city gates. Over time, these were moved indoors, to synagogues. Before the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem, the functions of the synagogue did not overlap with the sacrifices and purification rituals of the Jerusalem Temple. Instead, it functioned like a modern hotel and community center which on the sabbath was a house of worship and possibly a library.

The main religious activity in a synagogue was the hearing of scripture. (There were prayers, but probably no standardized liturgy.) A synagogue in a small town probably would not have possessed a copy of the torah or other Hebrew scriptures, which would have been a bulky and extremely expensive object that was also not very user-friendly. (The text was written without any vowels, spaces between words, or marks to show where a section began or ended.) Later synagogues had shrines for the torah, but the archaeological evidence doesn't seem to show that these existed during Jesus's lifetime. A rabbi in Galilee would have spoken the scriptures aloud in Hebrew, either from memory or by reading. He would then follow up with a translation and commentary in Aramaic, called a targum. It was forbidden for these targums to be written down until after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.

From a straight reading of the gospels, we would get the impression that the adult Jesus had a deep knowledge of the scripture

archaeological evidence, that Nazareth was an insular town and that its people saw the Hellenized Sepphoris as alien and unholy. Luke 4:16 places Jesus in a synagogue in Nazareth, but we don't know if one actually existed there. Any such scene, if historical, could have occurred just as easily in some larger town. Luke, if he existed as an individual, probably never came within 300 miles of Nazareth.

¹¹⁹Levine, "The Nature and Origin of the Palestinian Synagogue Reconsidered," <https://sci-hub.do/10.2307/3266895>

and was able to debate its fine points skillfully. But actually the passages in the gospels where he quotes scripture often show signs of being later layers added by Christian writers (2110). In authentic passages, his style is to teach in parables, cite secular proverbs, and make up his own short, pithy sayings.

It's possible that Jesus simply had a sketchy knowledge of scripture, patched together from hearing targums and the singing of psalms. His final words according to Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46 are a quotation from Psalms, in Aramaic, which suggests that these two evangelists thought that his knowledge of the scriptures was in Aramaic (presumably from hearing that psalm sung). If this was not the case, then it's hard to imagine why these two evangelists would have taken the trouble to write down the quote, transliterated into the Greek alphabet, and then painstakingly translate into Greek for their Greek-speaking audience.

Passages such as Mark 2:25 and Luke 4:16 clearly portray Jesus as literate, but this is likely an inauthentic later overlay.

215 In you I am well pleased

The gospels describe Jesus's baptism by John in ways that seem like attempts to rewrite history and make Jesus rather than John the master, which would be contrary to the historical evidence that John was the much more important and well known figure during the two mens' lifetimes. Jesus's baptism is also attended by a supernatural appearance by God, which doesn't meet my criteria for inclusion because it is a retrodiction of later Christian teachings to a time when those teachings didn't exist. The earliest manuscript of Luke, frequently quoted by the church fathers, has this:

Luke 3:21 Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus also had been baptized and was praying. The sky was opened, and the holy spirit descended in a bodily form like a dove on him; and a voice came out of the sky, saying "You are my son, today I have begotten you."

This is a quote of Psalms 2:7. The theology is altered in later manuscripts, which change God's words to "You are my beloved son. In you I am well pleased."

216 Sequence of events related to John the Baptist

Mark has the baptism in 1:9, a theologizing visitation by God in 1:10-11, a solitary vision quest in 1:12-13, and John's arrest in 1:14, and the evangelist uses the word "immediately" twice to say that the first three of these things happened in rapid-fire order, and therefore before John's arrest. In addition to violating the no-time-machine criterion (294), the divine visitation doesn't make narrative sense. If Jesus has had a personal visit from God, and knows that God is his father and is on his side, then there is no need for him to go out into the wilderness to try to sort things out. Mark wants to insist that all of these events happen, implausibly, in some very short period of time, because he doesn't want to admit that Jesus could have gone to John because he wanted to learn things from him.

The plausible sequence of events is that Jesus is baptized by John, he spends time learning from him, and then he creates his own schismatic school.

The gospels portray John's execution as happening before the beginning of Jesus's mission. However, the historical chronology shows that John survived until much later, around 36 CE.¹²⁰

218 The crime of false prophecy; methods of execution

In Luke 4, Jesus speaks in the synagogue at Nazareth, blames his failure to heal there on the Nazareans' lack of faith, identifies himself as a prophet, and is almost killed by an angry mob. The story doesn't occur in the other gospels, but John 8 conflates it with a scene at the Temple in Jerusalem. In 4:29, "They rose up, threw him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the

¹²⁰Visi, 2020, "The Chronology of John the Baptist and the Crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus."

hill that their city was built on, that they might throw him off the cliff.” There is actually no hill in Nazareth that could have served this purpose. Luke describes what he thinks is prescribed by tradition, and later the talmud, as a ritualized form of capital punishment (Sanhedrin 6-IV) for specific crimes. If the criminal wasn’t killed by the fall, he would be stoned to death. This was the method of execution that actually was used against Jesus’s brother James. Luke likes to supply legalistic details that he has no way of knowing about. The actual incident would have been more like backwoods vigilante justice, but since Jesus has just pronounced himself as a prophet, it seems clear to me that he is to be executed for being a false prophet. (But various interpretations have been proposed, Hill 1971.) The torah defines the crime, the punishment, and the criteria for deciding, sensibly enough, whether the prophet is false:

Deuteronomy 18:20 But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die. You may say in your heart, “How shall we know the word which Yahweh has not spoken?” When a prophet speaks in Yahweh’s name, if the thing doesn’t follow, nor happen, that is the thing which Yahweh has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You shall not be afraid of him.

Jesus is guilty under this legal test, because he failed to heal.

218 Historicity of Jesus as a fugitive

Luke and John portray Jesus as living on the run from the law, constantly in danger of arrest, sneaking around, and alienated from his family. This is probably an ahistorical exaggeration. Mark doesn’t describe many of these events, although he does recount a temporary alienation from his family (Mark 3:31, p. 56), makes it clear enough that John the Baptist and Jesus were both executed, and depicts Jesus as keeping a messianic secret.

The material in Luke and John may be an attempt to puff up the

dramatic conflict, and to avoid their listeners' default tendency to see a character like Jesus as just one more Galilean bandit, who was not very smart and therefore got himself killed. A bandit only qualifies as a folk hero if he is constantly slipping through the fingers of the law. A more extreme example of lurid crime fiction in the gospels is the sensationalized details of John the Baptist's execution. A less extreme example is John 2:15, in which Jesus's assault on the moneychangers in the Temple is made more violent by saying that he used a whip.

In John's case there is also an overt anti-semitic agenda of deflecting blame for the crucifixion from the Romans to "the Jews," whom he depicts as unreasonably hostile. John 7-8 is probably Christian fiction, and John 7:1-8¹²¹ doesn't meet my criteria for inclusion.¹²²

A more mundane and inherently plausible picture is one in which Jesus stays safe by staying almost entirely in Galilee, his familiar home turf, where there may be a threat from Herod Antipas but not from the Temple priesthood or the Romans. He doesn't even rise to the attention of the Jerusalem authorities until he intentionally commits provocative acts at the Temple. Then, according to Mark 12:12, he does temporarily slip through the law's fingers, although he is arrested and executed very soon afterward.

219 Bethsaida

Several locations have been proposed for the town of Bethsaida, some on the Sea of Galilee and some not. The biblical references may be to more than one of these places. The bible describes three of the apostles as coming from Bethsaida. In Mark 6:45, Jesus sends the disciples to Bethsaida while he goes away by himself to pray on a mountain.

¹²¹in which Jesus stays safe in Galilee, but his brothers taunt him to go and perform miracles in Jerusalem during Sukkoth

¹²²It has an ahistorical description of "the Jews" and anachronistic Christian symbolism of the eucharist. 286

20 Scribes; Jesus' ability to write

If Jesus could write, it was probably at the level of “craftsman’s literacy,” such as the ability to record business records. John, in the course of the story of the woman taken in adultery, says,

John 8:6 But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with his finger.

The verb translated here as “wrote” is κατέγραφεν, which could mean either that he wrote or that he drew.

Writing at the highest level of literacy was more like a specialized profession, that of a scribe. Because scribes were often officials in the hated Roman regime, analogous to lawyers and bureaucrats, most references to them in the NT are negative.¹²³ A scribe can also indicate one who is literate and religiously learned, and this class of people was also suspect because they were part of a leisure class associated with the exploitative practices of the Temple.

Jesus would have had no reason to write down any of his teachings, either himself or with the help of a scribe. His followers were illiterate, and the Kingdom of God was coming, so there was no need to record anything for future generations.

20 Summary of time and place in the gospels

Jesus was itinerant, and the synoptic gospels present his story as a road trip, whose broad outline is plausible: the country boy Jesus is chased out of his tiny home village of Nazareth, then travels to the large town of Capernaum,¹²⁴ gathers followers, and finally takes his gaggle of hippies to the capital of Judea, the Jewish center of the universe. Most or all of the twelve apostles were probably Galileans,¹²⁵ which makes sense if Jesus spent all but

¹²³an exception being Mark 12:28, p. 66

¹²⁴The gospels disagree on the details. Luke has Jesus first in Capernaum (implied at 4:23), then Nazareth (4:16), then Capernaum again (4:31).

¹²⁵Acts 1:11. If Judas’s name Iscariot derives from the town of Kerioth, then he

the final part of his mission in Galilee.

To get to Capernaum in Mark 1:21, Jesus would have probably passed through¹²⁶ the rich Hellenistic cities of Sepphoris (sacked in 4 BCE after a revolt) and Tiberias (built in 20 CE). Perhaps the poor and less cosmopolitan population of Capernaum was more likely to be a receptive audience.

Despite their narrative form, the synoptic gospels actually often arrange the incidents not like a chronology but according to the topics that the evangelists want to illustrate. Therefore it's a vain exercise to try to create a calendar of the events they portray. The synoptic evangelists were working from an oral tradition of Jesus's famous deeds, and of his sayings and parables, most of which were presumably things he said over and over again to different audiences. These authors wrote a screenplay of a road trip, with a sophisticated literary framework, and fit in the well known words and deeds where needed in order to illustrate the unfamiliar concepts of their new religion.

Even more so than the synoptics, John is concerned with theology over history, or even narrative. The sequence of events in John is wildly different from what the synoptics give (with the assault on the Temple, John 2:13, occurring *before* the rest of the ministry).

We would at least like to know how long Jesus's mission lasted. Probably one to three years. Luke 3:1 dates the beginning of John the Baptist's mission to 28 or 29 CE. The gospels also say that the last supper was a Passover seder, and that Jesus died before sunset on a Friday. This makes the best candidates for the date of the crucifixion 30 and 33 CE.¹²⁷

However, all of this depends on the assumed reliability of the

was a Judean.

¹²⁶map, Funk, p. xxii

¹²⁷Humphreys and Waddington, "Dating the crucifixion," *Nature*, 1983. doi:10.1038/306743a0

gospels as to chronology, whereas we know them to be very *inaccurate* as journalism. Arguments for very different results can be made. John 8:57 has Jesus being challenged by people saying, “You are not yet fifty years old! Have you seen Abraham?” Irenaeus argues that Jesus’s apparent biological age could not have been anything like 30, because then these hostile skeptics would have strengthened their point by saying, “Your are not yet forty years old!”¹²⁸

Attempts to further clarify the chronology and duration of Jesus’s mission get even shakier. These have tended to revolve around counting Jesus’s visits to the Temple in Jerusalem at festivals. The different gospels describe different numbers of these visits,¹²⁹ and in Mark 11, for example, all the coming and going to the Temple with impunity may seem hard to believe, especially if the authorities were now so intent on killing Jesus. Actually Jesus would have been theoretically obligated (Deuteronomy 16:16) to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem every year for three different festivals, one of which was Passover. So in fact the number of Temple visits mentioned in the gospels can be argued to be too small, even if Jesus’s public mission was a year or less in length.¹³⁰ But there is no reason to expect that the gospels would have recorded every such voyage by Jesus, and practical necessities would in any case have prevented every Galilean town from sending away all its men three times a year for a long pilgrimage (about a ten-day round trip on foot from Nazareth).¹³¹ John 7:1-8 gives an example where Jesus skips one such pilgrimage for fear of arrest, although that passage doesn’t meet my criteria for inclusion because of its ahistorical description of “the Jews” and anachronistic Christian symbolism of the eucharist [286](#).

¹²⁸White, Jesus at Fifty: Irenaeus on John 8:57 and the Age of Jesus. The Journal of Theological Studies, 71(1), 158-163. doi:10.1093/jts/flz170

¹²⁹John 6:4 is suspect [2118](#).

¹³⁰Vermes, p. 371

¹³¹Chilton, p. 23

219 Biographical sketch of Peter

Peter is traditionally considered the founder of the Catholic Church and its first pope. He is a composite of at least two people, since the Petrine epistles in the Christian Bible were written by one or more people who were not the same as the Peter of Mark 1. Although John 1:42 states Peter and Cephas to be one person, a widespread church tradition considers them to be separate individuals, and Paul uses the two names without obviously identifying them.¹³² The historicity of at least one Peter is supported by the criterion of embarrassment, since Paul viciously denounces Peter in Galatians 2.

The original Peter is a married man (Mark 1:30; 1 Corinthians 9:5). As an Aramaic-speaking fisherman from the Galilean town of Bethsaida (John 1:44), he was illiterate¹³³ and so left no writings. Although his brother Andrew's name is Greek ("Manly"), they were both Jews (Galatians 2:14). They were followers of John the Baptist (John 1:40). Peter's original name was Simon. Before meeting Jesus he may have already been nicknamed in Aramaic as Cephas, "Rock," which suggests a rough character. He is a hothead (Mark 8:31), sometimes violent (John 18:10), thick in the head (like all the apostles in Mark), and a coward who will lie to save his own skin (Mark 14:72).

In an anachronistic passage meant to convey authority after Jesus's death, Matthew 16:18, Peter volunteers out of nowhere that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." This is a recurring type of formula inserted in the gospels by the later Christian church as a model for its members to confess their faith.¹³⁴ A pleased Jesus plays on the Aramaic nickname and calls him Peter, saying "and on this rock I will build my church." The Greek word for church, ἐκκλησίαν ("gathering"), occurs in the gospels

¹³²Ehrman, 1990, "Cephas and Peter"

¹³³"ἀγράμματος," Acts 4:13

¹³⁴Funk, p. 207

only in Matthew, and labels an institution that was only later conceived and built, during the apostolic age.

Galatians 2:11 describes Peter/Cephas as coming to Antioch and getting in a huge confrontation with Paul over relations between Jews and gentiles, and Torah observance, although it's unclear why he would make the trip, since his job was supposed to be to spread the word to the Jews, not the gentiles. Ehrman speculates that this is because they are two separate people. Later church tradition portrays Peter as founding a church in Antioch and playing a long-term leadership role there. It's inherently implausible that an illiterate Galilean could become such a great mover and shaker in an alien, urban, Hellenistic society, so any such leader would be another (presumably fictional) member of the multi-person composite identity of Peter.

Acts 12, as part of the antisemitic program of Luke-Acts, portrays Peter and the apostle James the Great as coming into a dramatic and supernatural confrontation with Herod Agrippa, who ruled Judaea from 41 to 44 CE. James is executed, Peter is imprisoned, and Herod is killed by an angel. Josephus instead records this Herod as dying of a stomach ailment.

According to tradition, Peter made his way to Rome, became the leader of what was eventually the Catholic Church, and was martyred by Nero. There is no way to know how much of this is historical; the Neronian persecution was highly exaggerated in later Christian accounts.

224 Emotional terms in Greek and English; Jesus's initial reaction to the leper

Mark 1:41 describes Jesus's emotional reaction to being accosted by a leper. Some sources have ὀργισθεὶς, others σπλαγχνισθεὶς. These terms may not translate easily, because there is not necessarily a one-to-one correspondence between Greek and English emotional categories. Where English uses adjectives to describe an internal emotional state, "John is happy," Greek uses verbs

that deal with an outward cause or sign, “John rejoices,” or “John is fortunate.” *ὀργίζω* usually means to anger, but can mean to arouse passions. It may be related to *ὀργία*, a term used most often to refer to the cathartic and liberating secret rites of the cult of Dionysus. *σπλαγχνίζω* derives from the ritual practice of eating the internal organs of a sacrifice. Metaphorically, these innards are the seat of emotion. Cf. modern English “I was gutted,” “eat your heart out.” Usually in the gospels *σπλαγχνίζω* more clearly refers to compassion, but here it need not, and could be taken as saying that Jesus was “gut-wrenched,” a natural reaction to being confronted by someone with a loathsome disease. Either word seems perfectly believable given the cultural context (2103).

There is textual evidence for preferring *ὀργισθεῖς*. It would be more natural for a scribe to emend *ὀργισθεῖς* to *σπλαγχνισθεῖς*, rather than the other way around, in order to harmonize with the description of Jesus’s emotions elsewhere in the gospels. Matthew and Luke simply omit the description of Jesus’s emotional state in their versions of this story, which are presumably based on Mark’s. Luke has a general agenda of portraying Jesus as imperturbable, but he does describe Jesus as compassionate elsewhere, so it’s hard to see why he would delete *σπλαγχνισθεῖς* here, while it’s obvious why he would delete the more negative *ὀργισθεῖς*.

224 Healing the leper as a seditious act

The leper in Mark 1:40 is ritually unclean, and the Temple has a prescribed and expensive ritual for cleansing him, which is laid out in detail in Leviticus 13:2. Jesus’s command to go to the Temple for a follow-up visit (1:44) is natural because, although he disdains the people running the place and rejects their authority, he reveres the Temple itself, and it has the high-tech medical equipment. His initial anger in Mark 1:41 (if this is the original text, rather than “compassion”) makes sense in terms of this context, because the leper is asking him to do something illicit and

contrary to the Mosaic law. The Egerton papyrus's added "μηκέτι ἁμάρτανε" literally means both "sin no more" and "stop making mistakes." In the tanakh, leprosy is a punishment from god, but the Egerton papyrus's account seems to show this being revised during this period of history to something more like our modern understanding of infectious disease, although the reconstruction of the text about traveling and eating with lepers is uncertain.

The reason for the secrecy in Mark 1:35 is clarified once we see it again in 1:43-44, addressed this time to the leper. Following John's execution, Jesus is a former member of what the Romans would consider an outlaw group of seditionists or λησται (bandits). Furthermore, both John and Jesus have challenged the centralized theocracy's monopoly on purification ceremonies. As a subversive, Jesus is nearly killed by a mob in Nazareth. Mark may also be weaving these facts into a literary prefiguring of his motif of the messianic secret.

In addition to the objective historical reasons why it might have made sense for Jesus's movement to have worked in secret, there is textual evidence that the secrecy in Mark was an early tradition, and therefore possibly closer to the historical truth. In Mark 1:44, Jesus tells the leper to keep the healing secret. Matthew inserts this story into his own narrative as Jesus and his followers are hiking back down from the sermon on the mount, and says that there were "great multitudes" present (8:1), but then has Jesus give the command of secrecy (8:4) as in Mark, which doesn't make sense. Mark Goodacre argues that this is an example of editorial fatigue by Matthew, who habitually introduced large crowds in his accounts.

26 "Son of man"

A good summary of this controversial topic is given in a review article by Burkett.¹³⁵ Working backwards from the Greek text, the

¹³⁵Burkett, "The Nontitular Son of Man: A History and Critique," 1994, *New Testament Studies*, 40(04), 504-521. doi:10.1017/s0028688500026448

most likely possibility is that “barnasha” was the Aramaic phrase that Jesus spoke to mean “son of man.”¹³⁶ It’s a poetic Hebrew and Aramaic idiom for a human being. In these languages, it’s the same as “son of Adam,” since the name Adam just means “man.” There is no difference in these languages between “a son of man” and “the son of man.”¹³⁷ Either one is a grammatically possible construal of Aramaic “barnasha.” When the evangelists wrote down their translations of Jesus’s Aramaic words into Greek, which does have a distinction between the two, they therefore had a choice, and they generally translated it using a definite article, such as “ο” in Mark 2:10, “ο υιος του ανθρωπου.”

The Hebrew bible shows us the variety of usages and connotations associated with this phrase. For example, God uses it over and over as a form of address to Ezekiel, something like “O mortal man.” There it emphasizes man’s weakness and inferiority to God, but it can also be used to talk about man’s authority over the rest of the physical world:

Psalms 8:4 What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? For you have made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor. You gave him dominion over the works of your hands and put all things under his feet.

¹³⁶If Jesus had wanted to clarify, he could have said something like “hahu barnasha,” “this-here son of man,” clarifying that he was referring indirectly to himself. But this would have been translated into Greek as something more like “ουτος ο υιος του ανθρωπου.” “Bar gabra” or the absolute “bar enash” are also possible. Burkett, pp. 515-516

¹³⁷Nouns exist in three states, absolute, emphatic, and construct. By Jesus’s time, the distinction between absolute and emphatic was disappearing for nouns in Aramaic, so there were two states. The construct state is used for meanings like “goal of existence,” with the modified word “goal” changing form to the construct state and the two words being mashed together into one unit, “glexistence.” The emphatic state is used where we would use a definite article in English. Since a noun can’t be in both the emphatic state and the construct state, there is no difference between “a goal of existence” and “the goal of existence.” “Son,” “bara,” becomes “bar” in the construct.

“Son of man” occurs 95 times in Ezekiel, 20 times elsewhere in the Hebrew bible, 83 times on the lips of Jesus, and once as spoken by Stephen in Acts 7:56. Jesus never uses any other words that could be construed as a self-title. Notably, it never occurs in Paul, the earliest written record of Jesus or of Christianity, which suggests that it may have been added to the gospels relatively late.

Let’s focus on Mark as the earliest and least fictionalized gospel. Mark has 13 occurrences of the phrase “son of man,” which I render below as ***.

ambiguous	2:10, [To scribes:] “But that you may know that *** has authority on earth to forgive sins”-he said to the paralytic- “2:28, [To pharisees:] “Therefore *** is lord even of the sabbath.”
fabricated	8:31, 8:38, 9:9, 9:12, 9:31, 10:33, 10:45, 13:26, 14:21, 14:41
ahistorical	14:62, [Asked by the high priest whether he is the messiah:] “Jesus said, ‘I am. You will see *** sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of the sky.’”

It’s striking how many of these are either fabrications¹³⁸ by my criteria 286 or ahistorical (the historically impossible trial before the sanhedrin, 14:62). The remaining authentic instances, both in Mark 2, might or might not constitute an oral memory of some characteristic saying of Jesus, like Star Trek’s Captain Picard saying “Make it so,” and none of my argument depends much on whether it is or not.

Both the examples in Mark 2 occur in the context of rabbinical

¹³⁸13:26 is more ambiguous than the others, but the scene is set “on the Mount of Olives opposite the Temple,” which Jesus prophecies will be destroyed. The long discourse reads as a Christian fabrication.

debates between Jesus and the theocracy's leisure/literate class, and in both cases the subject of debate is whether it's all right to violate the rules and prerogatives ordained by God and enforced by the theocracy. The theocrats tell Jesus, "You can't do that." In both cases, there is then a very natural way of understanding Jesus's comeback: "Anyone can do that."¹³⁹ That is, "anyone has authority to forgive sins," and "man is lord even of the sabbath." This would have been a natural and familiar use of the phrase, as in Psalms 8:4.

These readings make much more sense than the titular one given in most English translations, "the Son of Man." That would be a mysterious distinction without a difference, like "the Man With Two Legs." How does such a non-distinction grant "authority on earth" or make someone "lord?"

We don't know whether Jesus chose this as a signature phrase, but there is an obvious reason why it would resonate for him as an individual. He is considered by his community to be a mamzer, a person born of forbidden sex, and they like to rub his nose in it (Mark 6:2). By using this phrase in confrontational situations, Jesus is taking his status and throwing it back at his opponents, like a person in US culture who embraces a label like "slut" or the n-word. It's not just that "any random guy has the authority," but "any random bastard like me has the authority."

The main objection raised against the generic interpretation of "son of man" is that it doesn't work for usages like the ones in Mark 8-10 and 14.¹⁴⁰ This objection seems irrelevant to me, since these passages are clearly Christian fabrications.

In standard Christian theology, the phrase "son of man" is said to be a reference to one place in the apocalyptic book of Daniel (7:13-14), which dates to a period of Seleucid persecution, where

¹³⁹Aramaicists consider "anyone" to be a possible reading. See Burkett, p. 510.

¹⁴⁰Burkett, p. 520

the the phrase is used to discuss a prehistoric world-wide kingdom and subsequent “everlasting dominion,” ongoing and already established by “one like a son of man” who “came with the clouds of the sky.”¹⁴¹ The trouble is that there is no evidence that the messianic interpretation of this verse existed Jesus’s lifetime. Such an interpretation occurs in the non-canonical Book of Enoch, but the relevant parts of Enoch were not among the fragments found at Qumran. Since there is no evidence that such a meaning would have been intended or understood by anyone during Jesus’s lifetime, there is not much motivation for considering it if one is working from naturalistic and historical criteria. However, it’s possible that it was a code word used by Jesus’s dissident group so that they could talk about his secret claims of being the messiah, but have plausible deniability. It would then be a double entendre known to the in-group.

227 Historicity of the twelve apostles

The tradition of twelve apostles is early and widespread in Christian writings, occurring in both Mark and Q (Luke 22:30), and also in Thomas, the Didache, and Paul’s writings (1 Cor 15:3). Luke and Mark disagree on one of the names (which is odd since Luke is believed to have used Mark as a source). The number twelve is given a numerological significance in Luke 22:30, and the idea of twelve apostles occurs in an ahistorical context in 1 Cor 15:3 (Jesus’s resurrection appearance to them). There is also a tradition of a larger group of 70 or 72 (Luke 10). Although Cephas and Peter are usually taken to two translations of the same nickname, per John 1:42, oddly there is a widespread ancient tradition of listing Peter in the 12 but Cephas in the 70.¹⁴²

The notion of an actual designated group of 12 or 70 seems unlikely to be historical, because they don’t line up at all with what we know from other sources about the movement’s leadership.

¹⁴¹This portion of Daniel was originally written in Hebrew.

¹⁴²Ehrman, 1990, “Cephas and Peter”

Josephus mentions Jesus, John the Baptist, and Jesus's brother James, but none of the Twelve. Peter is certain to have existed, since he is recorded as getting into very plausible controversies with Paul. Included with Peter in these controversies were two other Jews, John the apostle and James the brother of Jesus (not either of the apostles named James). These three are described by Paul as forming a core leadership group (Gal 2:9). But Paul's extensive writings never mentions the twelve except in one spot (1 Cor 15:5) which is in the context of a creed. Because Paul deals so extensively with the real-world mechanics of the early movement's politics and organization, it's impossible that he would omit any other mention of the twelve if such a group was historical. When Paul does discuss which leaders were at a fifteen-day meeting in Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18), the list is again the historically attested core group (himself, Peter, and James the brother of Jesus).

The criterion of embarrassment supports the historicity of (1) Paul's conflict with the core group of three; (2) the existence of the two apostles, Peter and Judas, who betrayed Jesus in some manner; (3) the description of Peter and Andrew in John 1:40 as having been followers of John the Baptist who were then poached by Jesus; and (4) the existence of Simon the Zealot, whose name Mark may be trying to obscure for political reasons.

227 The second discourse of Matthew

The commissioning of the apostles in Mark 3 is very brief, but Matthew has Jesus delivering a long Polonius-style speech to the disciples after this. There are commands meant to Judaize the movement (Matthew's audience was the Jews), and prophecies about the persecution of the Christians. Interspersed with these are many memorable sayings, including reassurances to his apparently very frightened apostles. I have included mainly the portions that the Jesus Seminar judges most likely to be authentic.

228 Not peace but a sword

During the second discourse of Matthew, Jesus says, “Don’t think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn’t come to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man’s foes will be those of his own household.” Starting at “For I came...,” Jesus is paraphrasing Micah 7:5. The context is that Jesus has just been telling prophecies about the later persecution of the early Christians. These famous verses are judged inauthentic by the Jesus Seminar.

229 Jesus quoting scripture

In Mark, Jesus seldom quotes from scripture. Nothing of this kind occurs until Mark 7:7. In Matthew he frequently does, and sometimes when Mark and Matthew relate the same speech, Matthew has scriptural references on Jesus’s lips that are not there in Mark (e.g., Mark 2:17 versus Matthew 9:13). Sometimes in these rabbinical debates, one evangelist inserts obscure legalistic details that another evangelist omits.

The Jesus Seminar tends to call scriptural references by Jesus inauthentic and hypothesizes that Jesus didn’t actually talk that way. I’m using naturalistic criteria rather than textual ones, but often they lead to the same conclusion, since the scriptural support is often used to argue that Christian doctrines are the fulfillment of scriptural prophecies, and this is not naturalistically possible because Jesus didn’t have a time machine and couldn’t have known what the doctrines of this future religion would be.

It’s possible that Jesus simply had a sketchy knowledge of scripture, patched together from hearing targums and the singing of psalms.

235 Whether Jesus’s mission extended to the gentiles

By the standards of a modern multicultural society, Jesus is a nasty bigot, referring to other ethnic groups as pigs and dogs (Matthew 7:6, Mark 7:27). The archaeological evidence (p. 91) supports the idea that Nazareth was a stubborn holdout against

the invading Hellenistic culture represented by nearby Sepphoris. If he is the messiah, then the expectation based on the models from the Hebrew bible is that he will be a military and political leader, and will reenact Joshua's deeds by expelling the invaders from the promised land. The precedent from Joshua is genocidal.¹⁴³

Joshua 6:21 They utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, both young and old, and ox, sheep, and donkey, with the edge of the sword.

Compared to these expectations, Jesus is less threatening. He grudgingly heals gentiles rather than hurting them. He talks about turning the other cheek, and potentially considering gentiles as "neighbors" (Luke 10:29, p. 33), whom we should love. Had his implicit political promises somehow succeeded, we have reason to expect that he would not have carried out a genocide.

But Jesus never speaks to any gentile about the kingdom of God, and he repeatedly tells his followers not to spread their message to the gentiles, especially in Matthew (7:6, 10:5). Although Matthew does conclude with the resurrected Jesus telling the eleven apostles to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), these commands are not authentic teachings of Jesus by my criteria ([286](#)), and the fact that they contradict the rest of Matthew also marks them as fabrications by some later editor.¹⁴⁴

The differences between the synoptic gospels clearly have something to do with power struggles over the direction of the early church. All three are constrained by Jesus's well-known sayings and by the fact, clearly remembered by his followers, that he gathered a band of apostles who were all members of the same Galilean ethnic sub-group. If Luke was a historical individual, he may have been a gentile, and the Lukan author(s) clearly want

¹⁴³Of the whole population of Jericho, Joshua spares only the prostitute Rahab.

¹⁴⁴Cf. the aftermath of the exorcism of the Gadarene demoniac, p. 119.

to expand the mission, after Jesus's death, to include the gentiles (e.g., Luke 4:27, about Naaman the Syrian). The authors of Matthew, on the other hand, are clearly writing for a Jewish audience, hence the fabricated genealogy and birth at Bethlehem. The question is then whether one version or the other of Jesus's teachings is more authentic. That is, did Matthew manufacture the words in 10:5 and 15:24, forbidding teaching the gentiles, or did Mark and Luke erase them? The latter seems more likely, by the criterion of embarrassment, and is also consistent with what we see in Matthew 28:19: later editors made additions and deletions in Jesus's words in order to make the gospels sound welcoming to gentiles. See Vermes, p. 376.

235 The sermon on the mount

The sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7 summarizes nearly everything that Jesus has to say about ethics. (There is also a shorter sermon on the plain, Luke 6:20-49.) It reads as a greatest-hits compilation of his most pithy and memorable wisdom sayings. There is a hypothesis that these sayings in Matthew and Luke come from a common source called Q.

236 Jesus's new ethics

Among the synoptic gospels, almost all of Jesus's novel ethical teachings are contained only in the sermon on the mount (or the shorter sermon on the plain), and not in the (likely earlier) gospel of Mark.

If a little green man from outer space were to read the gospels, not having any previous cultural indoctrination, he would say that Jesus's focus was solely on preparing for the end of the world, and had almost nothing to say about ethics beyond stern reminders to follow the preexisting Mosaic Law. If Mark and John were specific individuals, then evidently their entire picture of the new religion contained almost nothing worth recording in terms of new moral teachings.

Don't judge other people: Matthew 7:1. (The story of the woman

taken in adultery in John 8 contains a similar message, but most scholars think it was a later addition.)

No divorce: Matthew 5:31. Its duplication (with somewhat different legalistic conditions) in Mark 10:10 is the only clear exception to the rule.

Legalistic: Don't get involved in lawsuits, and don't swear oaths.

Emotional: Peace; forgiveness; turn the other cheek; love your enemies; anger is sinful. Lust is sinful.

Antimaterialism: This is not really novel but more a continuation of John the Baptist's teachings: a less extreme version of John's asceticism, along with a belief that material gains were useless since the end of the world was coming. Mark 10:21-25 have a similar antimaterialist message, but seem like a clear later interpolation rather than anything Jesus would have said, since they include the admonition to "follow me, taking up the cross."

236 Jesus's ethical example contrasted with the sermon on the mount

He set a moral example in his itinerant lifestyle ministry, but his conduct is sometimes inconsistent with the wisdom sayings presented in this sermon.

Jesus is sometimes violent (Mark 11:15, the assault on the money-changers in the Temple), angry (Mark 1:41, anger with the leper), and in his religious displays sometimes ostentatious (Mark 11:9, the entrance into Jerusalem).

236 Historicity of persecution of Christians

The opening of the Sermon on the Mount has an early highlighting of "persecution," which is then mentioned several more times in Matthew 5, as well as in the commissioning of the apostles in Matthew 10. If the Sermon on the Mount was a historical speech of Jesus, then one would imagine that his audience was one that had been greatly persecuted and was therefore very in-

terested in his advice on how to endure it and his reassurance that they would end up rewarded. The original word would have been Aramaic, but in the Greek text of the gospel the words put on Jesus's lips are all forms of the verb διώκω, which in classical Greek means to chase or pursue, although it could also mean to *prosecute* someone in court or (going back as far as Herodotus) to *persecute*. This subsidiary sense of the verb is seemingly being promoted to greater importance in the language of the evangelist and the later Christian church, and much the same thing happened with μάρτυς, which originally meant "witness" but eventually evolved to encompass something more like its English transliteration "martyr."

Modern readers are apt to conceptualize the persecution of Christians in terms of pop-culture images of Christians being fed to lions. But in first-century Palestine there were no "Christians" because the word hadn't been coined yet. What existed was Judaism, within which were various sects. Jesus's was one of these sects. It was in the habit of carrying out extreme acts of provocation such as invading mainstream synagogues and hijacking their services (Mark 6:1), as well as destroying property (Mark 11:15). The Jesus sect's leadership cadre included a known member of a violent underground extremist movement (Luke 6:15), as well as a known Roman quisling (Matthew 9:9). Their rhetoric was violent and advocated the disruption of the closest family relationships (Matthew 10:34, Luke 22:36). Perhaps their later boasting of their most violent interactions is fictional (John 2:15, 18:10; Luke 4:28), but it seems impossible that all four gospels would paint such a similar picture unless there were some kernel of truth there. In broad strokes, we have an extremely plausible depiction of a violent sectarian conflict in which the Jesus gang got in as many licks as it received. As time went on, this intra-Jewish sectarian conflict came to be mythologized by anti-semitic writers of later generations as "persecution" by "the Jews" (as if the Jesus sect itself had not been Jews).

Centrally directed, widespread, and deadly Roman persecution of Christians is only well documented as historical fact starting around 250 CE. It would have been impossible before 100 CE both because there was not even a word “Christian” and because the Roman empire lacked the appropriate bureaucratic apparatus to carry out anything so systematic. The Neronian persecution of 64 CE is probably historical, but it was localized to the city of Rome and could only have singled out known leaders rather than an entire demographic group of “Christians.” For these reasons, the Sermon on the Mount’s very prominent concern with “persecution” could not have been intelligible to Jesus’s audience at the Sermon on the Mount as a reference to the Roman empire.

Under the two-document hypothesis, quite a bit of the Sermon on the Mount is considered part of the Q source. However, Luke’s shorter Sermon on the Plain (6:20-49) lacks the language about persecution. Since the author of Matthew is believed to have been addressing a Jewish-Christian audience, it may be that he is addressing their experience of sectarian strife, which would not have been relevant to the gentile audience of Luke.

The material about persecution in Matthew 10:23 (“But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next...”) is easier to make sense of as a prophecy after the fact, written by Matthew based on real historical facts known to him and fitting logically into the arc of his narrative, which is essentially the story of how two of the movement’s leaders (John the Baptist and Jesus) come to be executed. It is true historically that the movement’s *leadership* was in great danger during this period, both in Palestine and in Rome during the Neronian persecution.

239 Why Mark might not contain Q’s novel ethical material

Mark doesn’t contain the Sermon on the Mount, or almost any of the other ethical material that to modern secular people would seem to be the only worthwhile ingredients of Christianity. If we

omit it, and also Mark's ahistorical resurrection narrative, then we are left with the strange (to us) picture of Jesus, the radicalized healthcare worker (286). Mark seems to be attempting to provide us with a biography of Jesus and a summary of his teachings, so how can it be that the gospel completely omits what we would imagine to be the core of his life and work?

The ethical material in the Sermon on the Mount is couched as a commentary on the Torah. That is the kind of thing that would be of interest to the putative Galilean Jewish audience of Q, but not to gentile Christians. The commentary on the legal system may likewise be more relevant to this group, who were oppressed by the Romans and the Second Temple authorities, than to Mark's audience. Although we are accustomed today to hearing the Sermon on the Mount as general moral advice, much of it makes more sense as a manual for this specific Galilean audience on how to cooperate and survive.

It's also likely that the proto-Christian community was extremely fragmented, so that Mark may simply not have known about the tradition of Q. Supporting this picture of extreme fragmentation, we have the myth of the rending of the Temple veil, Mark 15:37-38, which could never have been taken seriously by Palestinian Jews who visited the Temple during 30-70 CE. That such a myth could have been invented, circulated, and survived in Mark's gentile community brings home the fact that they must have been almost completely out of contact with the Q people.

249 Summary of material about the kingdom of God

The following is my own amateur analysis, from an atheist and naturalistic perspective. See the debate at the end of ch. 2 of Beilby for a discussion by experts that covers similar ground and expresses many possible permutations of contradictory opinions.

Jesus and his followers live in a theocracy, not a liberal democracy with separation of church and state. They have no way even to conceptualize a political revolution without a religious one, or a

religious one with no political side. It must be either both of these things or neither. The “neither” possibility won’t wash, especially after Jesus’s violent physical assault on the Temple in Jerusalem. Revolution is in the air, and will in fact happen in 66 CE with the First Jewish-Roman War.

They anticipate some great change in the institutions of power, but they don’t believe that the coming of the kingdom of God is only this. John the Baptist’s ministry was both a symbolic military reconquest of the promised land (crossing the Jordan) *and* a ritual to symbolize repentance and the cleansing of people’s hearts (Josephus, p. 7). Jesus’s ministry has the same dual purpose. He wants his followers to repent and purify themselves (as he himself did with John), then start building their utopia from the ground up (Thomas 113/Luke 17:20), and by doing so strengthen themselves and practice how to complete the transformation (Thomas 98).¹⁴⁵ This connection between spiritual worthiness and worldly dominion is inevitable given the familiar cyclical logic of the Hebrew bible, with the human race repeatedly losing and regaining God’s favor.¹⁴⁶

How fast is all this going to happen? If Jesus wants to build a movement, he can’t say that it will come to its final fruition next week, nor can he excite his followers by saying that it might take thousands of years. He tells them that it is already underway in the changes they are making at the personal and social levels (Thomas 113/Luke 17:20).

He does give a more specific timeline – one generation – in the synoptic gospels, but the context makes it questionable whether this is the evangelists putting words in his mouth. Mark 8:27-38

¹⁴⁵If the mythicized version of Jesus’s temptation in the desert in Luke 4 contains any authentic residue of Jesus’s thoughts on these matters, then it makes sense that he rejects the devil’s offer of temporal power. The political revolution has to be based on the right religious foundation.

¹⁴⁶Luke 17:25-32, whether spoken by Jesus or written by the evangelist, explicitly makes the comparison to Noah’s flood.

is a Christian fabrication (with the telltale “take up his cross”), at the end of which, Mark 9:1, Jesus tells the apostles, “...there are some standing here who will in no way taste death until they see God’s kingdom come with power.”¹⁴⁷ We also have in Mark 1:14, as Jesus emerges from the wilderness and embarks on his mission, “The time is fulfilled, and God’s kingdom is at hand! Repent, and believe in the good news.” But like Luke 3:10 (p. 10), this seems to me to be an attempt to harmonize John’s teaching with Jesus’s (289). A need for repentance was not one of Jesus’s themes in general.¹⁴⁸

Meanwhile, Jesus will at some point start planning his own timeline. Taking the sequence of events in Mark at face value, the one-generation statement in Mark 9 comes quite close in time to his suicidal actions in the Temple in Mark 11.¹⁴⁹ Jesus has already seen his mentor John the Baptist destroyed by the regime, simply for being a dangerous rabble-rouser (p. 11). He has no wish to get his own followers massacred by the Romans, but at whatever point in time he forms his plan of action at the Temple, he knows that it will almost certainly result in his own death. He doesn’t need to be a prophet or have a time machine in order to predict when this will happen.

2100 John’s account of the loaves and fishes, and the Passover

Mark 6:30 describes the miracle of the loaves and fishes, which is recapitulated in Mark 8:1-38. John embellishes Mark’s account. John implausibly has Jesus, before feeding the crowd, first lead them from the seashore up into the mountains, seemingly in order to make the occasion more impressive. John 6:4 also identi-

¹⁴⁷Similarly in Matthew 16:27-28, Luke 9:26-27.

¹⁴⁸Cf. Funk, p. 41 re the authenticity of this saying, and Vermes, p. 269, who tries to pick the verse apart into authentic and inauthentic parts.

¹⁴⁹They are separated by perhaps six months if we take seriously the kind of calendrical gymnastics done in Robertson, *A harmony of the gospels*, pp. 85 and 152.

fies the day as the Passover, which implies that everyone is disregarding their obligation to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem. The absence of this verse in the Minuscule 472 manuscript suggests that this was a later invention meant to add a theologizing preview of the last supper.

250 Garbled elaborations and editorial fatigue

One of my criteria for excluding material is garbling or incoherence attributable to the evangelist's agenda. This usually seems to show up in the form of a botched elaboration at the end of a story.

Mark 5:14-20 presents the aftermath of the Gadarene swine story, p. 49, in a scramble of reactions that are hard to account for except possibly as a mixture of feelings by different people at different times. Most likely the confusion and illogic occur because of the clumsiness of an editor in appending a story of the proselytization of Jesus's teachings to the gentiles – something that according the overwhelming evidence of the gospels Jesus strictly forbid. Cf. Matthew 28:19. For other analyses, see Chilton, p. 171, and Vermes, pp. 400-401.

Luke 4:28-30 presents a luridly dramatized story of Jesus narrowly escaping ritual execution in Nazareth. This violent episode, which is absent from Mark, is the last of a series of seemingly incoherent interactions between Jesus and the Nazareans in the synagogue. First they wonder at his gracious words; then they either insult his paternity (in Mark) or don't (in Luke). Luke then goes off the rails. Jesus anticipates and responds to a proverb that the crowd hasn't actually mentioned, and which in context questions his sanity; then Jesus, for no apparent reason, escalates by implying that he is a prophet and they are not real Jews; and finally they attempt to throw him off a cliff; but he, "passing through the middle of them," simply goes on his way.

Another example is Mark 16:9, Jesus's post-resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene, which was added later in which the

connecting sentences, description of time, and repetition don't make sense.

Matthew has an agenda of inflating the sizes of the crowds surrounding Jesus. When he copies a story from Mark, he often adds his characteristic phrase ὄχλοι πολλοὶ, literally "many throngs," or in the WEB translation "great multitudes" (Matthew 4:25, 8:1, 8:18, 12:15, 13:2, 15:30, 19:2). This results in garbling at the end of the story of the leper, in which Matthew 8:4 has Jesus give the command of secrecy as in Mark, which doesn't make sense because Matthew has placed the scene in the middle of a huge crowd.

Mark Goodacre has explained a number of examples such as the Matthean crowd/secret garbling as arising from "editorial fatigue," and uses them to support the hypothesis of Marcan priority.

255 Dogs

The metaphor of dogs is at the heart of the most central difficulty in interpreting the meaning of the historical Jesus's teachings.

The tanakh's references to dogs are uniformly negative. They are scavengers, dangerous, and ritually unclean:

Exodus 22:31 You shall be holy men to me, therefore you shall not eat any meat that is torn by animals in the field. You shall cast it to the dogs.

Deuteronomy 23:19 You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to Yahweh's house for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to Yahweh.

1 Kings 14:11 The dogs will eat he who belongs to Jeroboam who dies in the city; and the birds of the sky will eat he who dies in the field, for Yahweh has spoken it." ' '

Psalms 22:16 For dogs have surrounded me. A company of evildoers have enclosed me. They have pierced my hands and

feet.

This attitude does not seem to have changed until long after the time of Jesus. In the mishnah and mystical traditions, dogs are treated as a threat and as a metaphor for demons.

Gentiles had more positive attitudes about dogs. For example, Marcus Aurelius (Meditations 6.16.3) approvingly describes:

...the vineyard worker, the colt breaker, and the dog trainer ...

But in Hellenistic culture, describing a person as a dog was a different matter. When a woman was uppity or unchaste, she was traditionally described in ancient Greek culture as being a dog. For example, in *Odyssey* 18.338, the promiscuous Melantho scolds Odysseus, who replies by calling her a dog and threatening dismemberment.

Greek has four words for dog: κύων (classical and koine, dog), σκύλαξ (classical, puppy), κυνάριον (classical and koine, a diminutive meaning a puppy¹⁵⁰ or small dog¹⁵¹), and σκύλος (modern, dog).

In the new testament, “dog” is always an ethnic slur against the gentiles.

Matthew 7:6 Don’t give that which is holy to the dogs.

Philippians 3:2 Beware of the dogs; beware of the evil workers; beware of the false circumcision.

Matthew 15:22 Behold, a Canaanite woman came out from those borders and cried, saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, you son of David! My daughter is severely possessed by a demon!”

¹⁵⁰Euthydemus 298d

¹⁵¹Cyropaedia 8.4.20: “In the first place,” he answered, “she must be short, for you are not tall yourself, and if you married a tall maiden and wanted to give her a kiss when she stood up straight, you would have to jump to reach her like a little dog.”

But he answered her not a word. His disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away; for she cries after us."

But he answered, "I wasn't sent to anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

But she came and worshiped him, saying, "Lord, help me."

But he answered, "It is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

But she answered him, "Yes, lord. Yet even the little dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

Given the dual overlays of Jewish and Hellenistic culture, the implication for Matthew and Mark's Greek-speaking readers is probably not that Jesus likes puppies but rather a brutal slur, something like "the dirty little gentile b----es." The gentile woman is transgressing by bringing her uncleanness into a Jewish household, as well as by verbally accosting Jesus, who is trying to hide. In the subsequent exchange, she cleverly turns the slur to her sick daughter's benefit and becomes the only person in the gospels ever to beat Jesus in an oral argument.

260 Jesus entering Jerusalem

Jesus would have been in Jerusalem many times before on festival pilgrimages,¹⁵² but this is the dramatic climax of the gospel story, and Mark 11:1-11 has Jesus making this entrance triumphantly.

Up until now, both Jesus and his mentor John the Baptist have carried out a mission far from the centers of power, in the Perea wilderness and at whistle-stop towns in Galilee. John's execution came not from a conflict with the Romans, the Temple in Jerusalem, or the ruler of Judea Herod Archelaus, but for being a threat to public order (p. 11) in the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, which covers Perea and Galilee. Jesus is rumored to be the messiah, which would be a threat to Roman rule and its client theoc-

¹⁵²as recognized by Luke in Luke 2:41

racy in Jerusalem, but he has never made the claim publicly, and those at the centers of power have probably never heard of him. Even decades later, Josephus's account (excluding the forgery in Antiquities 18-3) portrays Jesus as at most a footnote compared to John.

There has been a lot of scholarly debate about whether Jesus's movement was revolutionary, and, if so, whether it was in any way directed against the Romans, or whether it was against the client theocracy. The account given by the author of Luke/Acts explicitly analogizes Jesus to other failed movements, and shows that there was plenty of room for ambiguity in the eyes of the council when the apostles were brought before them:

Acts 5:33 But they, when they heard this, were cut to the heart, and were determined to kill them. But one stood up in the council, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, honored by all the people, and commanded to put the apostles out for a little while. He said to them, "You men of Israel, be careful concerning these men, what you are about to do. For before these days Theudas rose up, making himself out to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves. He was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the enrollment, and drew away some people after him. He also perished, and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered abroad. Now I tell you, withdraw from these men and leave them alone. For if this counsel or this work is of men, it will be overthrown. But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow it, and you would be found even to be fighting against God!"

278 Historicity of Jesus's tomb

In Mark 15:42-47, Jesus is entombed with the help of a rich man who intervenes with Pilate. This is almost certainly a fabrication.

Precisely because people in the ancient world considered a decent burial to be so important, part of the punishment of cruci-

fixion was to be left out to be eaten by dogs and crows.¹⁵³

There is historical and archaeological evidence for exceptions to this rule. Josephus says:¹⁵⁴

...I saw many captives crucified, and remembered three of them as my former acquaintance. I was very sorry at this in my mind, and went with tears in my eyes to Titus, and told him of them; so he immediately commanded them to be taken down, and to have the greatest care taken of them, in order to their recovery; yet two of them died under the physician's hands, while the third recovered.

Furthermore, an archaeological dig in 1968 uncovered an ossuary containing the remains of multiple people, with an inscription reading Jehohanan.¹⁵⁵ One of the heel bones has a nail through it. This verifies that it was possible for the remains of a crucified person to be interred. However, we have no idea of the circumstances of this person's interment. For example, it's possible that he was left out as carrion and then thrown in a mass grave, with his family then extracting what was left. For opposing views on what this tells us about Jesus's possible tomb, see blog posts by Ehrman¹⁵⁶ and Evans.¹⁵⁷

Since a lack of a decent burial was part of the punishment, and Jesus was crucified as an enemy of the state, it would be extremely surprising for his remains to be released to one of his supporters as described in the gospels. Any of his supporters, even a rich one, would have been tainted by association with a political criminal, not treated with consideration as Titus did with Josephus, a Roman citizen and loyal comrade who had renamed himself Titus

¹⁵³Crossan, p. 160

¹⁵⁴The Life of Flavius Josephus, 75

¹⁵⁵<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jehohanan>

¹⁵⁶<https://ehrmanblog.org/the-skeletal-remains-of-yehohanan-readers-mailbag-october-8-201>

¹⁵⁷apparently no longer online

Flavius Josephus after his patron and his patron's dynasty. Josephus's reasons for recording this incident would be that (1) it is so incredibly unusual as to be interesting to his readers; (2) it depicts his patron as just and merciful; and (3) it show that Josephus is the kind of important person who can call in this type of favor (which is also the message of the longer passage in which this incident occurs). None of these three factors are likely to be present in Jesus's case. His execution for sedition was routine. Pilate was remembered as brutal and efficient, not kind and merciful. And Jesus was exactly the opposite of the sort of politically connected person represented by Josephus.

279 Reality or unreality of the resurrection experiences

The NT records that Jesus appeared, resurrected in the flesh, to a number of his followers, and that, just as the women were the only ones to remain with him during the crucifixion, women were the first to see him resurrected.

There is no a priori reason to disbelieve that Jesus could have cured some cases of what we would today call mental illnesses and psychosomatic illnesses, and likewise no reason for rejecting the possibility that Jesus's followers could have had real psychological experiences in which they witnessed him resurrected. The case for the latter, however, seems much weaker.

The details of the times and places of Jesus's post-resurrection appearances are inconsistent in the different accounts, as is the list of which witnesses are present when. Therefore we can't necessarily judge whose ecstatic experiences actually happened using only criteria such as internal consistency or historical possibility, time, place.

If anything, Jesus's appearances to his female followers are the most reliable, despite being described in connection with the historically unlikely tomb. Women were not considered reliable witnesses, and if it had not already been popularly believed that they were the first to see a post-crucifixion vision, before the apostles

or any other men, the evangelists would have been unlikely to invent such a thing. (Paul edits the women back out in 1 Corinthians 15:3.) But the women in Mark 16:1-8 do *not* see Jesus resurrected in the flesh, only a young man in a white robe, who they are too afraid to tell anyone about, despite his command to do so.

Once this account circulates in the scattered and distraught community of Jesus's former followers, it has to be embellished and made theologically correct. Men have to be included, in the account in Mark 16:9-20 that is added in later manuscripts. (See p. 120 re the garbled elaboration.). This had better be Jesus, not just a man in white robes (Matthew 28:8). It has to be clarified that this is not just a ghost, because that would be too ordinary (John 20:24). Anyone who wants to compete to inherit the leadership of the movement had better have his own vision (1 Corinthians 15:7).

Supporting this picture is the fact that resurrection visions sometimes contradict other clear statements Jesus made while alive, even within the same gospel, as in Matthew 28:19.

This interpretation requires that almost all the people who described these appearances were consciously lying, which is hard to square with the feeling that "liars make bad martyrs." However, there is little reliable evidence of any systematic or centralized persecution of Christians until 250 CE,¹⁵⁸ and accounts of the martyrdom of the apostles date to the second century and are highly mythicized.¹⁵⁹ In the gospel account, we have Peter lying repeatedly after Jesus's arrest, although it's the opposite sort of lie. And Paul is a slippery and self-aggrandizing character who is frequently dishonest (p. 129).

280 Biographical sketch of Paul

¹⁵⁸The Neronian persecution of 64 CE may or may not be historical. Shaw, 2015, "The Myth of the Neronian Persecution"

¹⁵⁹Moss, The myth of persecution, p. 137

Paul was a diaspora Jew from Tarsus, a Hellenistic city on the south coast of today's Turkey. He was born around the same time as Jesus and was a leather worker and tent-maker. His family was of the tribe of Benjamin, and he was a Pharisee and persecuted Christians until his miraculous conversion at Damascus.

He had an Aramaic name, Saul, and a Greek one, Paul, and he was comfortable in both these languages.¹⁶⁰ We don't know which was his milk tongue. His writing style in Greek was colloquial and punchy. As a man with one foot in each culture, he was perfectly positioned to transform the teachings of Jesus, the obscure Galilean Jew, into a gentile religion.

Paul's epistles are the first written records of Christianity. He appears to have had knowledge of Jesus's ethical teachings, since his ethical advice mostly agrees with the later gospel sources. But there are specific contradictions (p. 43), as well as a completely different big picture. For Jesus, the main point is to obey (and extend) the torah in anticipation of the kingdom of God, whereas Paul is creating an entire new religion in which sins are forgiven by Jesus's sacrifice. Paul seems to have had no access to any of the specific sayings of Jesus recorded in the gospels, which may only have been circulating at that time in oral Aramaic form, in Galilee. No otherwise attested original sayings of Jesus are ever quoted in the Pauline epistles.¹⁶¹ By his own account, his knowledge of Christianity is not from them but was instead received directly from God, in a vision:

Galatians 1:11 But I make known to you, brothers, concerning the good news which was preached by me, that it is not according to man. For I didn't receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have

¹⁶⁰He is described in Acts 21:40 as speaking "Hebrew," but from context this means Aramaic, the language of his audience.

¹⁶¹Price, in Beilby, p. 67.

heard of my way of living in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the assembly of God and ravaged it. I advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of my own age among my countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the gentiles, I didn't immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia. Then I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Peter, and stayed with him fifteen days. But of the other apostles I saw no one except James, the lord's brother.

In reality, some of Paul's information about the religion may have come from his Christian relatives Andronicus and Junia,¹⁶² or from his interrogations of the Jewish Christians whom he persecuted. He admits that he eventually met with historically real apostolic figures such as Peter and Jesus's brother James.

When his presentation of himself in the epistles is evaluated based on naturalistic and historical criteria, Paul comes off as dishonest and self-aggrandizing. By these criteria, his direct communication with God is not possible. He claims to be a Roman citizen, but this is very unusual for a Jew, and is argued to be "scarcely credible" by Koestler for a variety of historical reasons.¹⁶³ The author of Luke/Acts quotes Paul in Acts 22:3 as saying that he had studied with a great rabbi in Jerusalem, the premier religious leader of that generation, but Paul never makes this claim in his own epistles, and it isn't plausible.¹⁶⁴ He

¹⁶²Romans 16:7 "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners, who are notable among the apostles, who were also in Christ before me."

¹⁶³Introduction to the new testament, volume 2, p. 107

¹⁶⁴Koestler points out that since the rabbi, Gamaliel the Elder, was liberal and tolerant (see p. 123), it wouldn't make sense for Paul to persecute the Christians so rabidly if he was Gamaliel's student. For historical details, see Maccoby, pp. 51-

claims to be a formidable linguist (1 Corinthians 14:18), but his frequent quotations from the Hebrew bible, when not inaccurate or fabricated, are based on the Greek-language septuagint.¹⁶⁵ He compares his education favorably with that of the apostles (2 Corinthians 11:5).

Paul's concern is to arrogate authority to himself, and this authority is transmitted, through him, from two sources: the Hebrew bible and direct revelation from God. He never cites Jesus's actual words, since these had not yet been codified and made authoritative in the gospels. Just as a very large proportion of Jesus's words in the gospels are actually quotes or paraphrases from scripture, Paul spends a great deal of time citing the Hebrew scriptures (which very few Christians would have been able to access in writing, and which in many cases he tinkers with¹⁶⁶).

Paul took Jesus's brand of Judaism and proselytized it to the gentiles, something Jesus and his Jewish Galilean followers never contemplated during his lifetime, nor was it pursued actively by the other two main leaders of the early church, Peter¹⁶⁷ and James, the brother of Jesus. He claimed for himself the title of "apostle to the gentiles" (Romans 11:13). He traveled widely and went through considerable danger and abuse. Paul was an energetic writer of epistles to the early Hellenistic church, and tried

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¹⁶⁵For example, 1 Corinthians 15:55: "Death, where is your victory [νίκος]? Death, where is your sting [κέντρον]?" This is based on the septuagint's version of Hosea 13:14, "Death, where is your punishment [δίκη]? Hades, where is your sting [κέντρον]?" The Hebrew version quotes an angry Yahweh, who makes a long series of threats, in the course of which is: "I will be death, your plague [debareka]. I will be sheol, your destruction [qatabeka]." The question of Paul's knowledge of Hebrew is discussed in Maccoby, pp. 70-71.

¹⁶⁶For example, compare Romans 10:11, 'For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed," ' with Isaiah 28:16, "He who believes shall not act hastily." See C.D. Stanley, *Paul and the language of scripture*, p. 33.

¹⁶⁷In Galatians 2:11, Paul upbraids Peter as a hypocrite for refusing to eat with gentiles.

to settle disputes such as what should happen when a Christian was married to a non-Christian. His claims of authority were contested by Peter and Jesus's brother James (Galatians 2:11-12).

Like Jesus, Paul accepted women as important leaders.

The general time period when Paul lived and worked is far better established than for any other member of the early leadership except for John the Baptist. He is clearly located within second temple Judaism, and his writings never mention the fall of the temple, which makes it hard to imagine that he lived past that event. His description of his interactions with the other leaders (Peter and James the brother of Jesus) makes sense relative to Josephus's description of the leadership. He is traditionally said to have been martyred under Nero by decapitation around 64-68 CE, but these accounts date from a centuries after that date.

The clarity of the dating of Paul's life does not translate into clarity in the dating of his writings. Many of the epistles are products of a much later era that were attributed to him in order to piggyback on his prestige. Even for the epistles that are generally agreed to be his works, there are passages such as the following that are obvious later interpolations:

1 Corinthians 15:3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers at once, most of whom remain until now, but some have also fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, as to the child born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also.

The reference to the ahistorical twelve apostles is the only one in Paul's writings. The description of the resurrection is one that has been highly elaborated compared to even the later versions

of Mark, and therefore must date to ca. 80 CE at the very earliest.

Translations

In general, English translations of the bible are derived from the public-domain World English Bible (WEB), often unchanged. However, I've freely made changes for reasons of style or clarity; to provide more vivid or familiar language (e.g., "brood of vipers"); to eliminate reverential capitals; to correct language that I think is historically inaccurate (e.g., for τελώνιον, "toll booth" rather than WEB's "tax office"); to make the text more readable after my own elisions; and, in some cases, for substantive reasons, such as my own interpretations of what is meant by "son of man" in various contexts. The translators of the WEB ask that people not describe altered versions of the text as the WEB.

Translations of Josephus are from Whiston, 1737. The translation of the Didache is by Robertson and Donaldson, with language modernized by me. The translation of Philo is by Yonge. Translations of the Gospel of Thomas are by Thomas Paterson Brown (1938-2012), a counterculture figure who uploaded his translations of the gnostic gospels onto a university web site in Greece around 2000. Most verses of Thomas begin with "Jesus said" and end with "Whoever has ears, let him hear," but I have usually omitted these for readability. The translation of Tacitus is by Church and Brodribb.

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